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Excellence in Critical Condition:  
the current state of English higher education

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology: September 2015

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## Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Steve Fuller for his direction and support in the formulation and completion of this thesis. I came to Warwick with a proposal for a thesis on English higher education and with his help this turned into a viable research project. It was his suggestion which originally led me to research the classical origins of excellence. Secondly, I would also like to thank the research participants who not only consented to be interviewed but also discussed excellence and what it meant to them as academics and leaders in the English university.

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Abstract**

This thesis argues that excellence is emancipatory in the sense that it promotes individual and collective transformation and it traces this idealized concept back to Aristotle and the concept of eudaimonia (Aristotle: 2009). This is the idea that excellence promotes happiness and well-being; it enables human beings to flourish and live to their full potential. In short, the thesis is about the potential of higher education to transform lives, in particular those of young people. Thus the fundamental premise of the thesis is that a legitimating principle of English higher education is excellence defined as the Hellenic ideal and that excellence is emancipatory. The thesis operates from the perspective of Critical Theory and operationalizes the theories and concepts of Habermas. It argues that the political discourse of excellence – the economic imperative of competition - eclipses emancipatory excellence in discourse but that in the lifeworld of the university this transformational concept of higher education remains unaffected as a legitimating principle, despite recent government reforms. In a further subsidiary argument, the thesis argues that the emancipatory interests of the university, particularly those of social science are inextricably linked to those of wider society (Barnett: 1994; 2; Habermas: 1977; 1978; 1988) and that this critical normative claim can be realized in an ideal speech situation. The thesis argues that the ideal speech situation already exists in the scientific-public validation of Critical Theory geared at world construction (Strydom: 2011; 158) but that a space for a new discursive event exists in the wider public community of knowledgeable social agents (Bohman: 1999; 475; Nowotny: 1993; 308). This thesis is argued for using material from in-depth, semi-structured, conversation-led research interviews which were conducted with senior administrators, higher education policy specialists and academics across the English higher education sector.

## **Chapter one: Introduction:**

### **A critical normative approach to excellence in higher education**

**Excellence:** Excellence is a virtue to which all can aspire. In higher education it is an exceptional achievement which the individual and the collective aspire to when reaching for the dizzy heights of self-improvement and self-development through the acquisition of new knowledge of themselves and pursuit of knowledge of the external world. To reach for the stars and succeed induces happiness: it has been axiomatic since Aristotle (2009) that education is eudaimonic, it is good for people and society; it promotes a good life for all (Professor of English and Cultural studies at a Russell Group university). Thus activity exhibiting virtue, *arête*, that is excellence, becomes a habit. Through this specifically human reasoning, a constant sense of well-being and contentment, indeed a new understanding of ourselves and the world around us develops. And in striving to the best that we can be and developing ourselves, the individual and the group transforms the general conditions of life ever further. Society as a whole thus constantly develops, as does the human condition, moving onwards and upwards – up on to a new plane of existence.

Kristjánsson in quoting Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* thus:

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>1</sup>, Aristotle proposes a theory of ‘happiness’ (*eudaimonia*) – perhaps better translated as ‘well-being’ or ‘flourishing’ - as the ultimate good and unconditional end (telos) of human beings, for the sake of which they do all other things. Equating *eudaimonia* with mere contentment would be fit only for ‘grazing animals’. A life devoted to money-making may also be safely ignored; ‘wealth is not the good we are seeking’, as it is merely useful for some other end (Aristotle: 1985; 1-8 [1094a1-1096a10]). According to Aristotle it is empirically true that the well-being of human beings consists of the realization of their intellectual and moral virtues and in the fulfilment of their other specifically human physical and mental capabilities (Kristjánsson: 2007; 15).

Thus through the exercise of the virtue of excellence the ultimate transformation in the conditions of life takes place. That is – emancipation. This is how excellence is defined in this thesis and it is in this idealized context and notion of human capability and thus achievement – excellence - that higher education is argued for.

**Excellence in Critical Condition: the current state of English higher education** is a

doctoral thesis written from within the discipline of sociology. It is a critical and theoretically focused historical and contemporary study of the English university. The study seeks to argue that excellence which is defined as the emancipatory ideal in this thesis is a

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<sup>1</sup> See: Aristotle (1985), *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irvin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.



historical and contemporary legitimating principle of the English higher education system. A full and critical reflection on the Hellenic ideal, its origins, inherent contradictions and its interpretation in this thesis is made in chapter three (theory and methods). To support the argument, the thesis also argues that the Hellenic ideal expressed here is in opposition to the political discourse of excellence, projected publicly by the state as the mission of the university and one which is ostensibly engaged with, within and inter-institutionally by those in English higher education. This notion of excellence can perhaps be simplistically defined as the ranking system of higher education, promoted by performance drivers and which set out to measure the worth of the university as a national economic asset in a global race<sup>2</sup>. For example, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), now the Research Excellence Framework (REF<sup>3</sup>), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the National Student Survey (NSS)<sup>4</sup> and the national and global league tables.

### **The interviews:**

A number of responses from research participants taken from 28 in-depth, semi-structured and conversation-led research interviews which were conducted with senior administrators, academics and policy experts across the English higher education sector appear throughout the thesis and in this introduction<sup>5</sup>. They are referenced as in-text style academic quotes. For instance, as the following fictional example demonstrates: (Professor of History, 1994 Group research intensive university). The research questions asked were: how do academics experience competition in their daily work? And, how does the political discourse of excellence in higher education affect the lifeworld of the university? These questions and the concepts they carry are explained in this introduction and fully examined in chapter three on theory and methods. In short for now however, these questions were

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of the global race was introduced in the United Kingdom specifically by David Cameron, the prime minister of the Coalition Government which came to power in 2010. It refers to an international competitive struggle which as a nation we are said to be engaged in, in a battle for survival. Higher education as a producer of knowledge and skills is said to be crucial to this: See: [http://www.ippr.org/assets/media/publications/pdf/winning-global-race\\_June2014.pdf](http://www.ippr.org/assets/media/publications/pdf/winning-global-race_June2014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See Sayer's *Rank Hypocrisy: the Insult of the REF* (2014) for a critique and a history of the research assessment exercises.

<sup>4</sup> The NSS is a high profile census of students which began in 2005. It surveys the student experience of the quality higher education. See: <http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php>

<sup>5</sup> Please see the beginning of bibliography for list of research participants.

quite simply asking the participants first, how political policy which intensifies competition in and between higher education institutions changes their daily lives as academics and administrators, and second, how the state's idea of excellence resonated with their own view of higher education. In other words, the questions could have been stated like this: how does the state and political policy affect your life, your world and your experience of higher education? The participants were asked to consider the questions in an autobiographical framework so that they could reflect on how higher education had changed, if at all, since their first experience in the university. Moreover, if it had changed, then how far, they were asked, was this to do with state policy in higher education. However, because the interviews were mostly conducted at the time of or shortly after the Coalition reforms, they often elicited responses on the current state of English higher education. The material from these interviews is central to the main argument of this thesis and the methodology employed in the interpretation made of these for this study is discussed in chapter three on theory and methods. The responses/quotes in this introduction give an idea of the research material to follow in this thesis. These responses are contextualised in the framework of the opening arguments and the stated issues of this thesis and so their interpretation is contextualized as thus. There are also extracts and quotes from documentary sources. First, at the outset of this introductory chapter, a university strategic plan is critically analysed and secondly, and at the end of this chapter, the 2013 Higher Education for England Funding Council (HEFCE) grant letter delivered to universities by the Department for Business, Innovation and skills (BIS) is similarly examined through a critical discourse analysis (CDA). These documents are critically analysed in this introductory chapter in order to demonstrate that 'excellence', the Hellenic ideal, is one of a number of legitimating principles for English higher education. Therefore, this first chapter is in part designed to illustrate how excellence is defined in this thesis and, how it competes with other legitimating principles of English higher education. It begins with a critical analysis of a documentary source from an English university published in 2008 and this is critically examined along with interview extracts from the vice-chancellor of that university who was interviewed for the research

project aspect of this study on a number of occasions up until 2013. The chapter then moves to a brief presentation of the theoretical and methodological perspective of this thesis (which is explained in-depth in chapter three), to enable a critical and political discourse analysis (PDA) of the reforms made to English higher education by the Coalition government from 2010. Callender and Scott (2013: 2) argue that it is essential to understand the economic and political context of the Coalition in order to understand their reforms. Thus the context of the thesis ‘the current state of English higher education’ is presented first. The chapter then returns to the philosophical approach taken to excellence by this thesis by discussing its positioning alongside other perspectives taken in the contemporary literature on higher education. The introduction ends by critically analysing the 2013 grant letter from BIS in order to support the fundamental premise of this thesis which is that excellence defined as the Hellenic ideal is a legitimating principle of English higher education. Thus this chapter is book ended, so to speak, by the central argument of this thesis. The thesis is explained now by way of a critical analysis of a university strategic plan, extracts from interview material from the vice-chancellor of that university and an extract from a professor of higher education in a separate institution. Thus the following brief section is designed to highlight how excellence defined as the Hellenic ideal for this thesis is juxtaposed with competition in the academy: that is, what this thesis defines as ‘the political discourse of excellence’.

### **Excellence against the political discourse of competition**

In 2008, a university strategic plan: green paper stated as much, that is, that excellence is competition (Green Paper 2008, from a 1994 Group<sup>6</sup> Robbins<sup>7</sup> research intensive university). The following quote occurs in the context of a discussion on how to adjust to a government research funding policy in which there was a much greater selectivity: ‘The University will maximise its reputation as a world renowned research-

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<sup>6</sup> The 1994 Group has now been disbanded but until its demise in 2013, after a period in which it had lost members to the dominant Russell Group (see endnote i), it represented the smaller research intensive universities, had a strong dialogue with government in terms of policy and emphasised student experience.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Robbins University’ refers to an institution created after the eponymous Robbins Report of 1963. These universities tend to be research intensive. See chapter five for an in-depth critical analysis of this report.

intensive and critically engaged University by becoming a nationally and internationally recognised centre of teaching and learning, innovation and excellence and a university of choice for staff, students and employers'. During 2007-08, the university had developed a new strategic plan for 2015 and beyond. The Green Paper built upon an initial consultation document called: *Setting the Scope of our Ambition*, which was published in October 2007. The Green Paper (2008: 11) proposed the restructuring of the university and an engagement with excellence. Except for describing itself as a 'critically engaged university' nowhere in the paper however is excellence defined, other than through the ranking and reputational value described in the quote above. Marcuse (1964: 91) in discussing the functional use of language in a closed universe of discourse governed by political behaviourism, in which words come to represent things and conceptual meanings are absorbed by the words themselves, thereby preventing a development of meaning, stated that: 'the noun governs the sentence in an authoritarian and totalitarian fashion – the sentence becomes a declaration to be accepted – it repels demonstration, qualification, negation of its codified and declared meaning'. For example, in the context of a discussion on another and initial consultation paper for which staff responses were sought and, interestingly, called *Describing the Preferred Future*, this Green Paper simply refers to excellence as an ideal in abstraction which can be embraced and committed to: 'a declaration to be accepted' (Marcuse: *ibid*):

The initial paper raised a number of serious questions about the staff experience and the extent to which the University wished to embrace excellence. Responses to these questions highlighted a very strong commitment to excellence and desire to show explicit support and investment in staff to achieve this. (Green Paper 2008: 19)

The codified and thus declared meaning of the statement here is that excellence **will** be embraced and 'the university **will** maximise its reputation as a [functional] world renowned research-intensive and critically engaged university by becoming a nationally and internationally recognised centre of teaching and learning, innovation and 'excellence' and a 'university of choice for staff, students and employers', presumably by conforming to certain performance indicators conducive to the then environment of greater selectivity .

Indeed, the vice-chancellor of this university was interviewed for this study on three occasions between 2008 and 2013.<sup>8</sup> During the first of these interviews and referring to structural changes addressed in that Green Paper, and implemented following a subsequent White Paper, the vice-chancellor said that the RAE and the NSS had been invaluable to his academic staff to measure their performance internally and against those in comparator institutions. They had also proved invaluable tools to him, in pushing through reforms, changes at least, that were needed to keep this university not only high in the rankings of the national and international league tables, but to maintain itself as a genuinely transformational university, and one worthy of its reputation (Vice-Chancellor of 1994 Group, Robbins' university). Hazelkorn (201: 497) in a section of her work called *Putting Rankings into Context* states that many governments and higher education institutes (HEIs) around the world have redrafted their strategies to conform to the indicators<sup>9</sup> identified by the rankings. She goes on to say that 'it is widely recognised that knowledge is the new cornerstone of economic growth and national security; it is the new crude oil.'<sup>10</sup> This has driven the transformation of economies and the basis of wealth production from those based on productivity and efficiency to those based on higher value goods and services innovated by talent'. Quoting Slaughter and Leslie<sup>11</sup> (1997) she goes on to say that: 'In a globalized world, nations increasingly compete on the basis of their knowledge and innovation systems'. Thus in the example of the English university represented here the transformational potential of excellence in higher education is conflated with a strategy for internal and external performance measurement. And through this, it is allied to the power of the competitive ranking system of the English and international university system, driven by the competition for research and student resources and, firmly connected to the global

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<sup>8</sup> The full extract of this interview with this vice-chancellor is represented through the participant's own words in chapter six.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times Higher Education* World University Rankings give a good idea of the performance indicators used in global university league tables: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking/methodology>

<sup>10</sup> A Social Market Foundation pamphlet written by Liam Byrne, the shadow universities minister: *Robbins Rebooted* refers to universities as 'the power stations of the knowledge economy'.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Academic Capitalism. Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University, 2007)

competitive economic market<sup>12</sup>. In this way, it is arguable that competition and choice in higher education turns excellence away from the emancipatory ideal towards competition and striving to be the best becomes about ascending to the pinnacle of ‘the league of excellence’. A professor of higher education at a post-1992 university was asked for this research project how she saw the future of the sector after the Coalition government reforms. She said in principle at least, that, ‘the university could become the institution that as its crowning glory holds excellence, defined simplistically as high quality, aloft as the pinnacle of elitism : the concentration of resource at the top of a pyramidal higher education sector’ (Professor of higher education at suburban London post-92). However, that is, arguably, a dystopian future imagined, and the public engagement of universities with excellence as a performance measurement perhaps belies a deeper understanding of excellence in the academy. For example, the vice-chancellor of the Robbins research intensive university quoted above also said this during a research interview in 2012:

I think at the end of the day what I believe and there is a hell of a lot of... [sentence unfinished] the point was made at a meeting I was in at in Birmingham a couple of days ago. People were talking about [the fact that] virtually everybody has got excellence in their strategic plan, every university. But what I think singles out truly excellent universities is their most important outputs, their students, the quality of their students, what their students go on to do. Not necessarily the level of award that they get, but what they do, how their experience has changed them (Vice-Chancellor of 1994 Group, Robbins University: 2012.)

And when asked about philosophies of higher education which can be interpreted as being encompassed by the Hellenic ideal, the liberal, utilitarian and emancipatory, he said:

I think you can seek and find and demonstrate excellence in all of those areas. We must not become just an employability machine. As I say, we talk about the need to adhere to blue skies research. I want to continue to see to blue skies teaching and learning. I want students to come to this university without a clue as to what they’re going to do when they leave. I want them to immerse themselves in something that absolutely fascinates and turns them on, and drives them to find out, to discover and to change and enhance themselves (Vice-Chancellor of 1994 Group, Robbins University.)

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<sup>12</sup> See Marginson and Wende (2007) for discussion on the ‘world university market’ and international ranking system prepared by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU).

And so the ‘universe of discourse’ (*ibid*: 7) is not closed and the liberating principle of excellence is something that is recognised within the academy and by leaders of English higher education but the expression of this is so often, it seems, overwhelmed by the more utilitarian message of the state<sup>13</sup>. And indeed, it is so often – as we will see - overwhelmed by the discussion of the radical reforms and interventions made by the state, past and present. The current reforms were argued by government to be necessary to meet the needs of state and society in a time of economic crisis and this has ignited academic debates on what the university should be in the future, (see section *Apocalypse or Excellence?* below) while in public debate however, excellence becomes simplified in discussions of government policy to mean the university as an institution which might promote success in a global economic struggle: that is the global race. These next sections of this introductory chapter present just a sketch of the discussion which seems to overwhelm the humanistic expression of excellence made by the vice-chancellor above. Firstly however, the objectives of this thesis are set out:

#### **Aims and objectives of the thesis**

- The thesis: That excellence defined as the Hellenic ideal is a legitimating principle of English higher education.
- To make a historical and contemporary case for this thesis by conducting a critical and political discourse analysis of historical and contemporary sources.
- To present the material from the research interviews in support of the thesis and subsequent supporting arguments:
- A subsidiary argument will demonstrate that historically, excellence has been eclipsed or subordinated by the economic imperative and the political discourse of excellence and indeed, it still is.

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<sup>13</sup> See Barnett (1990:5) who argued then that a functionalist view of higher education leads to it being judged solely in terms of its contribution to UK Inc and that this ignores the intrinsic value of higher education.

- Thus to argue that the ideal speech situation would represent the space in which a discursive event could re-appropriate excellence for the university and raise it to the same status as that of the economic imperative and the political discourse of excellence.
- To argue that this can be achieved to an extent through the scientific-public validation of research on excellence in higher education but that a new space in the community exists.
- To demonstrate the contribution of the thesis to the sociology of higher education; it reinterprets the meaning and the role of excellence in English higher education.

**The current state of English higher education: A critique of coalition policy;  
An introduction to the economic imperative**

Fundamentally then, this thesis takes the political discourse of excellence to mean the way that English higher education has been directed according to the economic imperatives of the state, historically, and now, at a time when the country is still in the grip of the latest global economic crisis or ‘the Great Recession’ (Clark and Heath: 2014). The thesis is centred on the reforms made to English higher education by the Coalition government since it took office in 2010<sup>14</sup>. The economic imperative of the Conservative-led Coalition in a period of austerity is victory in the ‘global race’<sup>15</sup> (IPPR: 2014; 1, a). This is the competitive economic struggle in which we are in battle with the rest of the world, according to the Coalition government of the UK (United Kingdom). And thus higher education is firmly connected to this struggle through the ‘Industrial Strategy’ (BIS: 2013; 4, a) of the government which requires the research innovations and graduate skills for the knowledge society, which universities can provide to help win the competition. Nussbaum (2010: 2) argues that the concentration on the economic imperative is obtuse in its short-sightedness, fuelling as it does competition, short-term instrumentalism and profit. Moreover, that in privileging transferable skills and applied research over the arts and humanities it sits in

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<sup>14</sup> This thesis was completed before the General Election of 2015.

<sup>15</sup> See: *Our plan for growth: science and innovation* a strategy document published by BIS (2014: 3) in which states that: ‘Science and innovation are also at the heart of our long term economic plan. The UK’s science base is extraordinary – our cutting edge research base is world leading, our universities are world-class, we develop and attract the world’s brightest minds and we are second in the world when ranked by Nobel prizes. Science is one of our clear comparative advantages in the global race.’



contradistinction to excellence - the critique of the status quo - to which the former are wedded, and as such, represents a radical shift in our universities and thus, our societies, which is inimical to democracy.

Nussbaum (2012: 2), writing in the context of the United States (US), and a government movement aligning education ever more closely and simply to national economic success and a similar move away from the social sciences and arts and humanities in higher education, argues – perhaps somewhat dramatically - that:

Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education are producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements. The future of the world's democracies hangs in the balance. Nussbaum (2012: 2)

Nussbaum goes on to say that:

... what we might call the humanistic aspects of science and social science - the imaginative creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought – are also losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit making. Nussbaum (2012: 2)

The drive by governments around the world to instrumentalize higher education and the consequences of this on the humanities and the university as an institution of public worth and one which drives critical public discourse is also taken up in different ways by Bate (2010) and Small (2013).

This thesis will argue from its research study into the historical development of universities in England that their rise was fuelled by a legitimating principle which represented a belief in human progress and freedom. However, in contrast to Nussbaum, and based on contemporary empirical research, it will argue that despite the tightening of the connection between the state, competitive economic society and the university during the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the liberating conceptualization of excellence with which this thesis began is still the critical normative position from which English higher education operates. Indeed, the thesis will argue that this can be seen through a critical discourse analysis of political communications emanating from the state as well as

from empirical research into higher education itself. Therefore, this thesis is also written and argued as an implicit counter to the deadening-presentation of excellence made by Readings (1996) as an empty and meaningless performance measure in *The University in Ruins*.

### **A theoretical perspective on discourse, language and ideology**

In order to support its fundamental premise, this thesis takes a critical philosophical and political approach to the analysis of English higher education, past and present, engaging with theories across the disciplines. Indeed, in presenting its subsidiary arguments, the thesis takes a transdisciplinary approach through a critical discourse analysis. In doing so, it engages with other disciplines across the social sciences and arts and humanities and, with social theories from various theoretical perspectives within sociology which are also concerned with recent interventions in English higher education and which focus on the wider social process. However, primarily, the thesis operates from the perspective of Critical Theory, Habermas and his reconstructive theory of Marxism, represented through the linguistic turn. In short for now, this reconstructive theory argues that the interests of social science are emancipatory in that they are constituted by and so reflect the interests of society and that these can be realised in a communicative action (Habermas: 1987b). The thesis is written and researched from this perspective (<sup>16</sup>Van Dijk:1993; 5).The desk-based historical research and the critical policy analysis in this thesis are combined with the material taken from 28 in-depth, semi-structured and conversation-led research interviews which were conducted with senior administrators, academics and policy experts across the English higher education sector. In describing and defining critical discourse analysis and its relationship with theory and method, Fairclough (2001:121,122: 2013: 4, 231) suggests that its methodological approach is constantly evolving. It is a developmental, transformative theoretical and methodological exercise and a critique of aspects of the social process involving collaboration or ‘co-engagements’ between those with different theories and

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<sup>16</sup> Van Dijk argues that: The use of critical discourse analysis presupposes a particular and indeed, ‘explicit socio-political stance on the part of the researcher, which it is the convention to spell out’.

methods which then in turn develop CDA methodologically and, as a joint approach or venture critiquing the social:

CDA is in my view as much theory as a method – or rather, a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis (including ‘visual language’, ‘body language’, and so on) as one element or ‘moment’ of the material social process (Williams: 1977), which gives rise to ways of analysing language or semiosis within broader analyses of the social process. Moreover, it is a theory or method which is in a dialogical relationship with other social theories and methods, which should engage with them in a ‘transdisciplinary’ rather than just an interdisciplinary way, meaning that the particular co-engagements on particular aspects of the social process may give rise to developments of theory and method which shift the boundaries between different theories and methods (Fairclough: 2000a). Put differently, each should be open to the theoretical logic of others, open to ‘internalizing’ them (Harvey: 1996) in a way which can transform the relationship between them. Fairclough (2001:121,122)

The theory and method underpinning this thesis and its empirical research are discussed in depth in chapter three. For now however, and in terms of its critical analysis, this thesis takes the ‘broader social process’ Fairclough refers to as meaning the political, social, economic and cultural context. Thus this thesis places the critical theoretical study of the language of excellence in English higher education within a thematic analysis of wider social life. That is to say, it looks at excellence within the wider framework of a critical discourse analysis of the changing ideologies of the English political system over time and the changes to the contemporary discourse of English higher education as one moment in the material social process. The term ‘discourse’ is defined in various ways and its application is dependent on the interpretation of the researcher and the topic at hand. As the extract from Fairclough above suggests, (and see Fairclough: 1992:1)<sup>17</sup> the methodology employed in a critical discourse analysis is a consequence of a developmental and evolving synthesis of different social and political thought and method (s) of language analysis which are open to the theoretical logics of each other and ‘open to internalizing them’ (*ibid*). Fairclough (1992:

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<sup>17</sup> In 1992 in *Discourse and Social Change* Fairclough stated that the objective of his book was to find a language analysis which was both theoretically adequate and practically usable. To quote: ‘To achieve this, it is necessary to draw together methods for analysing language developed within linguistics and language studies, and social and political thought relevant to developing an adequate social theory of language’ (1992: 1). The extract from *Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research*, 2001, quoted above, illustrates how this had developed into the transdisciplinary (2001:121,122) approach which this thesis also operates from.

225) states that: ‘there is no set procedure for doing discourse analysis; people approach it in different ways according to the specific nature of the project, as well as their own views of discourse.’<sup>18</sup> Additionally, (1992: 3) and in discussing Foucault, Fairclough defines discourse in one sense as ‘different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice’, to ‘explain how certain ideas and values are embodied in the communications of a community or society’. Fairclough (1992: 7) then goes on to state that: ‘Habermas (1984) has focused upon the colonization of the 'lifeworld' by the 'systems' of the economy and the state, which he sees in terms of a displacement of 'communicative' uses of language - oriented to producing understanding - by 'strategic' uses of language – ‘oriented to success, to getting people to do things.’ Thus in ‘being open to the theoretical logic of others [and] open to ‘internalizing’ them’ (*ibid*), this thesis defines discourses as social practices which are structured to communicate and express certain ideas and values. That is, dominant ideas or theories of knowledge [ideology], around which society is organised ‘oriented to produce understandings’, and which are embodied in political policies and mediated through institutions, such as universities, which are themselves then signified by the ‘strategic’ and ‘instrumental’ political language of the state, oriented to getting people, or in this case the university, ‘to do things’ (*ibid*). For example, this communicative use of language can be argued to be codified in ‘the political discourse of excellence’ in higher education, which is defined at the start of the thesis, and which it is argued, attempts to orient higher education towards competition and the economic imperative and this is communicated through the discourse of ‘the global race’: the notion - idea that as a nation we are engaged in an international competitive struggle to ensure national growth and prosperity. Thus this thesis argues that the ideas and values of the state are transmitted in language, communications from the government about the purpose of higher education which then connect the state, the economy and society to the university through ‘the enactment’ of knowledges (e.g. the discourse of the knowledge economy) as social practices” (Fairclough and Graham: 2013;

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<sup>18</sup> Van Dijk (2000) acknowledges that CDA does not have a unitary theoretical framework or methodology because it is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches instead of one school.

301-2). The thesis argues that the connection of the university to the state via the economic imperative and through the discourse of the global race can be seen now and historically. In chapter four, the thesis illustrates this through a critical analysis of the historical development of English universities, from the development of the civics in Victorian England and the period of classical liberalism-laissez-faire, to the Liberal social reforms of 1906-1914, to the development of the welfare state and Keynesian economics in 1945 under the post-war Labour government of Atlee, before moving on in chapter five to a critical discourse analysis of policy in English higher education. That chapter begins with a critical discourse analysis of the Robbins Report (1963), continues with the Dearing Report (1997) and concludes with the Browne Report (2010) and the White Paper (BIS: 2011). Thus through this critical discursive analysis the thesis returns to the current situation in English higher education, that is, to 2013/2014 and life for the English university under the Coalition and in the latest stage of capitalism: neo-liberalism. The concept of ideology as Eagleton (1991:1) states ‘has a whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other’. The meaning attributed to ideology in this thesis is explored and explicated in the theory and methods chapter (chapter three). However, for the moment ideology is defined as an economic imperative impinging on the lifeworld from outside, which Finlayson argues the Habermasian approach to ideology makes possible in that: ‘The notion that labour markets must be ‘flexible’ lies at the heart of neoliberal theory. What makes the notion of flexibility ideological [in Habermas’s sense] is that it is an economic imperative intruding on the lifeworld from the outside’ (Finlayson: 2003; 181). Neoliberalism is defined in this thesis as a belief in liberal economics: the efficiency of the free market, competition and competitiveness and thus a belief that the market has primacy of place over the state, that is to say, it is an economic critique of the state, which paradoxically, legitimates, empowers and expands the state (Davies:2014)<sup>19</sup>. See theory and methods chapter which follows the

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<sup>19</sup> Neoliberalism is discussed again at the end of this first chapter and in-depth in chapter three of this thesis. See also ordoliberalism which contrasts with neoliberalism though its view of the state. Originating in Germany post-1945, the doctrine of ordoliberalism espouses belief in a social market economy, social protection alongside the market, and sees the state as a necessary institution to

review of literature for a full and critical analysis of neoliberalism. This thesis argues that the political discourse of excellence, that is, competition, competitiveness and the market constitute an economic imperative intruding on the lifeworld of the university from outside. The concept of the ‘lifeworld’ is also explicated in chapter three but again in the meantime it is defined simply now as a cultural universe in which actors exist and communicate shared experiences and cognitive understandings. Habermas (<sup>20</sup>TCA 1: chap. 6; 1998b, chap. 4) defines it thus: ‘the background resources, contexts, and dimensions of social action that enable actors to cooperate on the basis of mutual understanding: shared cultural systems of meaning, institutional orders that stabilize patterns of action, and personality structures acquired in family, church, neighbourhood, and school’. Through this definition it is apparent that the concept of lifeworld can refer to the institution of the university and its specific culture, hence the concept of ideology defined and utilized here as the economic imperative which ‘intrudes’ (*ibid*) or impinges on the lifeworld of higher education.

Thus this thesis takes a pragmatic approach by examining the contemporary political discussion of English higher education with a view to elucidating the connection between the transformative and utilitarian aspects of excellence through rational deliberation. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 5, 10-12) in discussing the objectives of political discourse analysis, argumentation theory and the best framework in which to do this, and after tracing the origins of these to Aristotle and his treatment of the relationship between deliberation, decision and action in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2009), states that politics is about argumentation and decision making, involving practical reasoning or practical argumentation. Thus Fairclough and Fairclough also go on to say that politics is compatible with the views of practical reasoning produced in philosophy, particularly moral philosophy, and with general speech acts and of the construction of social reality by means of speech acts (Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012: 12). They then go on to say that they ‘share the

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intervene in the economy to achieve the market ‘ideal’. See: Dullien and Guérot (2012) *The Long Shadow of Ordoliberalism: Germany’s Approach to the Euro Crisis*.

<sup>20</sup> TCA: *Theory of Communicative Action*

reasonableness of pragma-dialectics<sup>21</sup> and its critical rationalist view of the essentially critical function of argument'. Importantly, they also go on to state that they see the evaluation of practical argument as a bridge between argumentation theory and the concerns of CDA, with a critique of discourse which involves a form of evaluation from an analytical standpoint, thereby increasing the capacity of CDA by providing powerful ways of analysing argumentative discourse. In terms of this thesis, its philosophical orientation and argumentation style, Fairclough and Fairclough state that this joint approach offers a way to investigate and address 'what is to be done' in the context of the economic crisis and may contribute to forms of normative and explanatory critique that can be applied in investigating how the political question is addressed. This is the conceptual and analytical framework and the 'theoretical perspective on language' (*ibid*) which this thesis takes: the thesis proceeds from a critique of political policy on English higher education and a theoretical position which argues that a systematic moral and ethical examination of the normative validity claims of the speech acts ; a critical discourse analysis— in this case, of the political discourse of excellence - can be conducted in the lifeworld of the university (Habermas: 1996: 180-193; <sup>22</sup>Finlayson: 2003). Thus methodologically, and operating from the emancipatory perspective outlined above, this thesis applies the concept of immanent transcendence which is argued by Honneth (Strydom: 2011: 95) to be the defining concept of Critical Theory. That is, the dialectic of the real and imagined (the ideal) communicative communities. That is to say, that in this thesis, immanent transcendence represents a synthesis between the state and university resolved in the transformative concept of 'excellence' which was presented at the start of this introduction. Thus in an additional theoretical position taken from Habermas which is applied in this thesis as the counterfactual to the political discourse of excellence

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<sup>21</sup> Pragma-dialectics refers to a theory of argumentation developed by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) which presents the ideal model for critical discussion intended as an environment in which speech acts can lead to the resolution of disputes. The preconditions for this are similar to those of the ideal speech situation (1987).

<sup>22</sup> Finlayson argues that once an economic imperative intruding on the lifeworld has been shown to be ideological and thus unmasked as a strategic or instrumental demand of the system of money and power then it is subject to prosecution by moral and ethical discourse: its values compete for recognition in the lifeworld (Finlayson attributes this example to Louise Haag).

(Benhabib: (1985; 85-88), the ideal speech situation (ISS)<sup>23</sup> is posited as the communicative action in which to achieve this synthesis<sup>24</sup>. In discussing the work of Habermas and how his theory of ‘communicative rationality’ can be explained in terms of a theory of argumentation which examines validity or truth claims, Fairclough and Fairclough represent a quote from Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984: 18):

We use the term *argumentation* for that type of speech in which participants thematize contested validity claims and attempt to vindicate or criticize them through arguments. An *argument* contains reasons or grounds that are connected in a systematic way with the *validity claim* of a problematic expression (Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012; 32)

This quote represents a conceptualization of the rational deliberation encapsulated in the concept of the ideal speech situation (see theory and methods chapter for the full idealized environment for the concept). Thus with particular regard to its theoretical approach, this thesis problematizes the expression of ‘excellence’ delivered as the political discourse, that is the economic imperative of the state. The ideal speech situation is developed as a theoretical communicative space for the university and state to resolve the difference in meaning in excellence in chapter six of the thesis, where material from the research interviews for this thesis are presented to support the argument that the individual, higher education and the state are intimately connected in their interests.

In order to frame the current state of English higher education, the thesis begins in the contemporary era in 2010 and what was on the face of it a radical cultural shift in the provision of higher education, when the Coalition government trebled tuition fees. This was, arguably, an attempt to finally alter the conception, perception, that is, the idea of the

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<sup>23</sup> The ideal speech situation is a concept developed by Habermas that would allow unconstrained thus rational discussion of validity (truth) claims through reasoned evidence and motivated by consensus: see theory and methods chapter three; the logic of the ISS presupposes the emancipatory dialectic of immanent transcendence as defined above; immanent transcendence is operationalized through the reconstructive explanatory critique (Strydom: 2011:136). See theory and methods chapter.

<sup>24</sup> However, as Dryzek (1995: 104) argues, ‘the ideal speech situation is not supposed to be an attainable ideal but rather a critical principle best thought of as providing procedural criteria concerning how disputes might be resolved or the conditions under which consensus might be achieved, rather than a theory of human needs or principles for individual conduct and social arrangements’. Indeed, this is how the ideal speech situation is conceived in this thesis; as a theoretical communicative space for higher education.



university in society and the very purpose of higher education. This was the part implementation of the Browne Report (2010) by the Coalition government in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2010 which at the same time as trebling tuition fees, began to remove the teaching grant from many areas of the academy. Thus to assess the current state of English higher education and examine the question which is implicit in the title of this thesis, that is, whether excellence is in fact in critical condition, the thesis starts by fixing the context of its study on English higher education with a presentation of the changes made to the funding of the university by the Conservative – Liberal-Democratic Coalition government in 2010: a critical analysis of the Browne Report (2010) itself will follow in the policy section of this thesis in chapter five as well as later in this introduction. Scott and Callender (2013: 2) state that: ‘The economic context within which the [Browne] review’s recommendations operated was one of global recession and unprecedented cuts in public expenditure. This is paramount for understanding its recommendations – and the Coalition’s response to them. So, too, are the political context and the Coalition’s ideology.’ Thus the following sections of the introduction to this thesis are designed precisely to provide this framework in an attempt to understand the Coalition’s reforms.

### **The political context of English higher education: introduction**

In a new era of austerity in May of 2010 a coalition government formed by the Conservative and Liberal-Democrat parties came to power in the United Kingdom. One of the first acts of the Coalition was to implement in part the Browne Report (2010)<sup>25</sup> on higher education (The Browne Report was commissioned by the previous Labour administration and taken on by the Coalition). The Coalition’s radical reforms to the funding of higher education in England in 2011 firstly involved the trebling of tuition fees for undergraduates and the removal of the ‘T’ grant. The gradual withdrawal of government monies for teaching, most notably from the social sciences, and the arts and humanities; an act justified through the inversion of the Idea of the university as a public good to a private one,

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<sup>25</sup> *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance*. [www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report](http://www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report).

(Callender: 2013) and ostensibly one that the state would and could no longer afford to fund in the face of a deep recession. A mechanism to make this appear the reality and to create a market in English higher education was the provision of loans to students to cover the cost of fees and so make them the consumer and the funder of universities - not government.

Thompson and Bekhradnia of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) put it like this in 2010 when expressing their concerns about the Coalition's implementation of the Browne Report:

Of more general concern has been the principle, strongly articulated by both Browne and the government that the government ought not to fund universities directly, but that to the extent that government funding is provided it should be provided through the student. On this view the government provides the student with a voucher – or rather a loan that acts as a voucher – and the student carries a voucher to the university of their choice. Student choice, and the market as reflected through student choice, determine the funding of universities, and the government plays no direct role. (Thompson and Bekhradnia: 2010: 2)

So Thompson and Bekhradnia point to the way in which the Browne Report was used by the Coalition to remove the state from the equation in higher education and the attempt to implement a student choice driven market, as indeed Browne had suggested, but how close are these radical reforms made to English higher education to the philosophy of the Conservative-led Coalition? Perhaps an answer to this question can be found in the following political discourse analysis of the philosophical statements of the Coalition which perhaps indicates the rationale underpinning the reforms made to English higher education. The following sections of the thesis are designed in an attempt to understand and explain, what is to be argued here, is an incoherence in policy implementation in English higher education, and to that end, to make conclusions as to whether the reforms are ideological and (or) economic in their making and moreover, whether they are further mediated by political compromise. So, in continuing with these themes now, the Great Recession had, on the face of it at least, made a new era of austerity and the accompanying cuts and changes to the way public institutions like the university are funded inevitable. This, at least, was the

propaganda. (Blythe: 2013; Dorling: 2014a; Clark and Heath 2014; McGettigan: 2013; O'Hara: 2014).

In discussing the methodology of political discourse analysis in the context of the economic crisis and taking examples from the print media, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 8) differentiate between systemic and non-systemic accounts of the causes of the economic crisis. Simply put, systemic accounts take the failure of the global economic system or neoliberalism as the reason for the economic crash, non-systemic accounts make an explanation through a narrative which blames the recession on the moral failure of individuals and the mistakes and inadequacies of particular governments. As will be argued throughout this section, the Great Recession began to be redefined under the Conservative-led Coalition in a non-systemic explanation in a narrative designed to shift the debate away from the global economic order, the markets and national and international banking systems and place the blame for the deficit firmly on spending on social protection and public services made by the previous Labour administration. Thus the global economic meltdown or credit crunch was redefined as a national recession, and one caused by the profligacy of the previous Labour administrations: previous administrations which, according to the Conservative leader, David Cameron, had spent vast sums of money on an over-blown state bureaucracy. These had not only wasted vast sums of money on public spending and caused the deficit, but had also had detrimental effects on society. The state would therefore have to be reduced in size and responsibility for previously administered state services would either be tendered to the private sector or in the case of higher education, be made a matter of private individual interest. The project to shrink the state and introduce a market into all areas of public life, including higher education can be seen as a continuation of an ideological project which began in 1979 under the auspices of the Thatcher Government and which heralded the end of the post-war settlement (Scott:1995; Scott: 2013; 33). It is argued that this project continues under the tenure of the current prime minister, David Cameron, leader of the Coalition government and the Conservative party (Toynbee and Walker: 2012). However, Gamble argued in 2011 that Cameron did not to date have a coherent strategy and

was following a Blairite strategy in making incremental reforms to the state and public services and that:

The Conservatives, it is said, are seeking to shrink the state, at least back to where it was before the crash, and possibly to a permanently lower level. Evidence for this ambition lies in the radical plans for reshaping health, education and welfare which have been unveiled since May 2010. Against this have to be set the difficulties the government has had in actually implementing its cuts, which have forced it to retreat in a number of areas. Some areas such as welfare reform and the trebling of university tuition fees may deliver long-term savings, but in the short run they are likely to increase expenditure (Gamble: 2011; 176).

In fact, Gamble was incorrect here, at least with regard to higher education, as the reforms to date have not delivered savings and will not do so as they stand, in the long-term, as this study will show throughout this introductory chapter. Thus it is argued that the reforms represent, in short for now, a false economy<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, the Conservative-led Coalition can be said to be simply following policy and strategy in higher education laid down previously by New Labour and Labour under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown respectively and it is therefore, coherent in that sense: a professor of higher education was asked for this study if there was a continuity of policy in higher education between the Conservative administrations from 1979-1997 and New Labour from 1997 to 2010. This was his answer:

Exactly. What you need to look at is Dearing in 1997, fees of £1,000 not introduced until 2000. 2003, fees go up to £3,000. 2010 they go up to £9,000 or somewhere below that. [The introduction of fees had first been proposed by the Conservative administration prior to the election of Blair in 1997] One other interesting thing is that I'm absolutely sure, and I had this from a senior civil servant, I said to him, how did the Gordon Brown people manage to pick John Browne? 'Well, Browne was in and out of Downing Street under Blair. He was known to have an interest in higher education'. My guess is that Browne had been earmarked to do the Independent Commission by Adonis and Blair. All Gordon Brown was, (*sic*) he just took the name and gave it to him. No, I think there is absolute continuity. I think it's bi-partisan (Emeritus Professor of Higher education and policy specialist).

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<sup>26</sup> See Intergenerational Foundation Report by McGettigan (2012) which also argues that the Coalition's reforms are a false economy: <http://www.if.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/False-Accounting-Why-Higher-Education-Reforms-dont-add-up.pdf>

A chief executive officer of a small interest group in higher education who was also interviewed for this study believed the same. He said during the course of the conversation that, ‘yes, New Labour policy was in many ways a continuation of the policies begun under the Thatcher administration. The difference was the language. For example, the rhetoric of ‘the Third Way’<sup>27</sup>, ‘modernisation’ and the notion of ‘public choice’ belied a belief and a determination to further implement the market in areas of public life which the state had previously administered and to overhaul the public services in the same vein as Tory philosophy’ (Chief Executive Officer for small interest group and policy expert). Indeed, Fairclough argues that the New Labour administration headed by Tony Blair – which existed under far more favourable economic conditions than the Coalition faced - were ‘totally committed to the neoliberal global economy’ and how Blair and his ministers and public relations (PR) men used rhetorical devices to disguise the incongruence between the old social democratic policies associated with ‘old Labour’, and the free market liberalism espoused under the doctrine of neoliberalism. Fairclough argues that, Like Margaret Thatcher before him, Prime Minister Blair asserted then that ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA) – there is no other way of life than the neoliberal life’ (Fairclough: 2000; viii). So there is continuity in terms of funding policy between the previous administrations of Labour and the Conservative-led Coalition and, clearly, in terms of their philosophical approach to the market. However, before the General Election result in 2010 and before a coalition government had become a fact of life, David Cameron made no secret of his ambitions if he found himself leading a government or of his plans for the state if he were to become prime minister, whilst criticising the past administrations of Labour, he said this at the Conservative Party conference in 2009:

Don't get me wrong, I have no illusions. If I win this election, it is going to be tough. There will have to be cutbacks in public spending, and that will be painful. We will need to confront Britain's culture of irresponsibility and that

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<sup>27</sup> *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* by Anthony Giddens (1998) introduced the concept of ‘the third way’. The notion was introduced as a way of transcending the (class) divisions of the right and left in politics and the theorist and the concept are said to have been highly influential with Tony Blair and New Labour, after the general election of 1997, who were concerned with finding a new way forward following the demise of the post-war settlement.

will be hard to take for many people. And we will have to tear down Labour's big government bureaucracy, ripping up its time-wasting, money-draining, responsibility-sapping nonsense. (David Cameron in *The Guardian*: 2009)

Here, Cameron alludes to a line of political thought on the right of politics which believes trenchantly that the state undermines individualism and self-reliance by creating a dependence on the welfare state<sup>28</sup>. The approach taken by Cameron to the state could be said to signify a rupture or discontinuity in the relatively moderate philosophical approach of Blair and to mark a radical dismantling of the state. On the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013 the *Guardian* reported this: “In 2010, just after he was elected, David Cameron said: ‘We're tackling the deficit because we have to – not out of some ideological zeal. This is a government led by people with a practical desire to sort out this country's problems, not by ideology’. And the article goes on to say that in 2013 at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet he said: ‘the government is to forge a “leaner, more efficient state on a permanent basis” (David Cameron quoted in *The Guardian*: 2013). Moreover, and according to *The Guardian*, ‘he signalled he had no intention of resuming spending once the structural deficit has been eliminated, a clear change to claims made after the last general election’. However, and as we read previously in this section, David Cameron (*ibid*) had announced his intention to ‘tear down Labour's big government bureaucracy, ripping up its time-wasting, money-draining, responsibility-sapping nonsense’ in 2009 at the Conservative Party conference, before he had ever been elected. So what is going on – how can we explain these changes in position by the prime minister? First, and of his speech in 2013, we can say that as the economy was improving then and an election was getting ever closer, that the prime minister felt emboldened enough to signal a continuation of his original project articulated in that 2009 party address. On the 2010 statement we can say that he had just found himself in a coalition government and this necessitated compromise and perhaps some speedy footwork. After all, it was argued by a research participant interviewed for this study that because of

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<sup>28</sup> See *Good Times, Bad times: the welfare myth of them and us* by John Hills (2015) who argues that the narrative used to construct a division between for example, ‘strivers and skivers’ is a false one as we all take equally from the welfare state throughout our lives.

the poor state of the government finances the Coalition had but one week on coming to office to reform all areas of public spending and take 25% out of the public sector and that policy, particularly on higher education was made because of this exigency (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist) As discussed earlier, Callender and Scott (2013; 2) also emphasize the extreme economic circumstances in which the Coalition found itself. So it is reasonable to suggest that on first assuming office with the Liberal-Democrats that David Cameron was shocked and (or) surprised to find that the reforms he wanted to make to the state because of a philosophical commitment were necessary anyway because of the poor state of the public finances. It is also perhaps reasonable to suggest that the budget deficit and national debt provided the pretext for an ideological project to be undertaken (Toynbee and Walker: 2012), and/or continued as has been discussed here already. Moreover, it is also reasonable to suggest that policy on higher education had been set in train by previous administrations and that any ideological language surrounding the implementation of new policy has simply been uttered by way of taking credit for a seemingly radical shift in political thought so as to provide some meaning to the Coalition's actions and thus, the purpose of a government seriously constrained by economic circumstance and thus seeking legitimacy. However, in a coalition compromises must be made so this also needs to be accounted for in an analysis of the political context of English higher education, in order that we can try to find an understanding of the drivers behind the radical reforms made to university funding. Thus the role of the Liberal-Democrats in the current government is important in this context.

The Coalition is of course made up of two parties and the presence of the Liberal-Democrats as one half of the Coalition is salient to the state of English higher education and, to the arguments surrounding the implementation of reforms as we will see. Indeed, the Liberal-Democrats are also, to an extent, liberal free market economists or as they are sometimes referred, 'Orange Book liberals', because of their association with the work *The Orange Book: reclaiming liberalism* by Paul Marshall and David Laws (2004). Amongst other things, this book set out the Liberal-Democrat's affirmative position on a free market

economy and their rejection of 'nanny state' liberalism, a fairer tax system and promotion of social justice, a line of political thought that could be said to resonate with the philosophy of compassionate Conservatism and the notion of the 'Big Society'<sup>29</sup> espoused by David Cameron. However, the espousal of more right-wing thinking by the Liberal-Democrats should perhaps be juxtaposed with the leftist state supporting wing of the party represented by for example, *Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century* (Brack, Grayson and Howarth 2007), a book which promotes the more egalitarian side of the Liberal Democrats party. Thus it might be argued that the Liberal-Democrats are fellow travellers in the Coalition, in the sense of quiet and acquiescent partners as Toynbee and Walker (2012) do, or alternatively it could be argued that they share the same ideas about the future of the state as the Conservative leadership.

There is no doubt however, that whatever the influence of these political dynamics actually are, that the state administration of services has in the past been reduced and its services handed over to the market, and are again being so now, under the guise of the Big Society agenda (Meek: 2014; Tam: 2011), and that this is an explicit aim of the Coalition as we will also see shortly. The relevance of the dynamics of government to higher education are this. The reforms made to the funding of English higher education do not fit clearly with either a 'neoliberal' (Brown: 2011; 18) free market or a social-democratic approach. It is possible to argue then, that policy on higher education is caught between two ideological poles, between that of the right of centre Conservatives and the Orange Book liberals and the social democratic wing of that party and that policy on higher education represents a compromise. The part implementation of the Browne Report for example: the report had recommended the removal of the fee cap but the Coalition stopped considerably short at

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<sup>29</sup> 'The Big Society' is a concept of society which the prime minister, David Cameron introduced and which can be interpreted in various ways. First, for example and as possibly intended for public consumption, it is the idea that the community of citizens come together to help each other and build society. Second and alternatively however, it can also be interpreted as the notion that in an era of the diminution of the welfare state, private citizens have to come together to run services previously run by the state, to fund them and provide the personnel. See David Cameron's conference speech of 2009 for the articulation of these concepts: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/oct/08/david-cameron-speech-in-full>



£9,000, possibly to assuage the Liberal-Democrats, despite being warned by Browne in his report not to do this or, to cherry pick his recommendations. Scott (2013: 32-33) argues that the difference between the recommendations of the Browne Report and the Coalition's implementation of it is explained by the political flux that succeeded the indecisive result of the general election. The party's leader, Nick Clegg, and now deputy prime minister of the Coalition had promised prior to the 2010 election to abolish fees were he and his party elected to office. The deputy prime minister was forced to renege on this promise on coming to office and this and the fee increase itself fuelled vociferous and violent student demonstrations. Indeed, a number of the participants for the research interview stage of this study put forward the theory of political compromise as a reason for the incoherence of this and other policy interventions in English higher education. Scott (*ibid*) states that given the surprise result which led to the Coalition government and which saw two parties with incompatible policies on higher education (Watson: 2013: 195) come together, that 'some degree of political ambivalence at Westminster and Turbulence in Whitehall was inevitable' (Scott: 2014; 33). Thus it is in this political context that it is widely thought that the appointment of Professor Les Ebdon in 2012 to head the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) by the business secretary, Vince Cable was facilitated, despite the wishes of some members on the right of Conservative party, as a recognition of the Liberal-Democrat's role in government. However, whether this analysis is accurate or not, the appointment of professor Ebdon was clear evidence of the commitment on the left of that party to widening participation, which professor Ebdon as former Chair of the Million+ think-tank and former vice-chancellor of the University Bedfordshire represented. As evidence of this compromise in coalition, the Liberal-Democrats have, in areas outside higher education, forced through their own policy ideas in government as a quid pro quo for supporting Conservative initiatives. For example, the success of deputy prime minister Nick Clegg in holding to his 'red lines' (his non-negotiable position in government) and pushing through the pupil premium shortly after having to rip up his manifesto pledge on free university tuition in 2010. And additionally, the Liberal-Democrat policy of providing free school meals for

every infant is said to have been agreed with the Conservatives in return for supporting David Cameron's marriage tax allowance. The Liberal-Democrats were to abstain in a Commons vote to allow that bill to pass (Guardian Politics: 2013). So we can conclude that Coalition policy has been constrained by tactical considerations (Callender and Scott: 2013; 206) and thus there is indeed compromise in coalition, but how is a political philosophy used to support policy, and how do economics play into the justification for the radical reforms made to higher education by government?

### **The philosophical and economic justification of the reforms to higher education**

Collini's (2012: 188) account of the implementation of the Coalition's initial funding reforms to English higher education argues that these did indeed represent an ideological assault on public provision made under the cover of a whipped up public frenzy about the need to cut the deficit which the government argued and indeed, still argue, was due to the profligacy of the previous administration. Collini also argues that the Browne Report (2010) was congruent with the cuts made by the Coalition and that Browne simply 'wielded the axe' (2012: 188) in advance of the first Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) undertaken by the Coalition. Public expenditure on higher education in the shape of 'almost the entire' (*ibid*) block grant for teaching was cut. In other words, Collini suggests that the cutting of the T grant was an expression of the ideology of the government. Indeed, and in attempting to elucidate the rationale of the Coalition in making cuts, Dorling (2014a: 62-63) points out that despite the long economic recession being attributed to New Labour (rather than to the bankers), that is, government spending on social protection and public services, that gross debt was very low in 2007, just before the Great Recession began. David Cameron (*ibid*) for example said this in his speech to the Conservative Party conference in 2009. 'Our national debt has doubled in the last five years and our annual deficit next year will be over £170bn'. Dorling (*ibid*) however uses data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to show that in 2007 government accumulated debt was just 47% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared with the OECD average of 73% and the annual deficit was just 2.7% of GDP but that after the bail-out of the banks and by 2013

accumulated debt was 75% of GDP. The annual deficit then was three times as big as in 2007 resulting in Britain losing its triple-A credit rating. However, the narrative that the recession had started because of massive public spending had started almost as soon as the recession began to affect the UK, as we have already seen. Indeed, and as Clark and Heath write, David Cameron changed his behaviour - persona at this time and went from effecting 'the pragmatic air of Harold Macmillan – a truly moderate mid-twentieth Conservative, to go on, after the economic crash in 2008, to sound more like Barry Goldwater', (Clark and Heath: 2014; 208) an American Republican and libertarian who campaigned against the New Deal and thus Keynesian economics. Clark and Heath reference the speech made by David Cameron to the Conservative Party conference in 2009: In this, Cameron asked himself a question: 'Why is our economy broken?' As Clark and Heath state, he then went on to answer this question himself:

Because government got too big, spent too much and doubled the national debt. Why is our society broken? Because government got too big, did too much and undermined responsibility. Why is our politics broken? Because government got too big, promised too much and pretended it had all the answers (Cameron: 2009, in *The Guardian*)

Again Cameron talks here of the profligacy of big government - for which we can read the state – and the undermining of responsibility, suggesting that from now on the individual would have to begin look after and think of themselves. Of course the notion of Cameron's Big Society is also implicit in this extract. However, crucially, and as Clark and Heath (2014: 208) argue, Cameron in a time of grave economic crisis 'sought to persuade those lucky enough still to be in employment that the greatest danger to them came from the [reckless] social welfare state' which he attempts to make synonymous with the previous administration of New Labour. Cameron also said this in the same speech: 'The clearest sign of big government irresponsibility is the enormous size of our debt'. In fact, up until the end of 2008 when it became clear that a deep recession was on its way, the Conservative party had promised to match New Labour's spending on social protection (Dorey: 2009). Thus it seems the impact of the recession allowed politicians on the right to show their true colours

so to speak, and to shift the debate on the causes of the Great Recession, but moreover, to attempt to construct an idea for public consumption on how society should work in the future, and indeed, who and what should shape it. And in the process, David Cameron moved from compassionate Conservative and ‘heir to Blair’ (Gamble: 2012) to ardent Thatcherite. Importantly here, Morley (2012:26) argues that the Coalition’s initial reforms were made because of economic concerns arising from the recession, but that they were also ideological. Citing Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine* (2008), and setting her observations in the context of ‘disaster capitalism’ she argues that economic crises are used to make [or in this case renew] radical political changes (see also Levitas 2012<sup>30</sup>). In pointing out that the (CSR) 2010 was cutting money from the higher education budget, Morley (2012:26-27) states that ‘... .. austerity measures can also be seen as ideology posing as technology, repositioning higher education as a private positional good and luxury product’. Indeed, Collini (*ibid*) states that the Browne Report was ‘breathtaking’, in that it marked the ‘complete dismantling of the public character of higher education’ - that is to say, that overnight higher education became a private matter for the individual and not the state or society. When a participant of the research project aspect of this thesis was asked about the perceived perilous state of higher education after the Coalition’s reforms they said:

Why do we see higher education in crisis? Well I think that all our reactions and certainly mine was shock at higher education being seen as 100% private good rather than a public good. Whereas, I would have said the 2003 formulation, [in 2003 New Labour trebled tuition fees for the first time following the Dearing Report in 1997] it was fair to say it was both a public and a private good, but eliminating the public good all together is mildly shocking. (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist)

Collini argues that the arrangement prior to Browne represented an ‘intricate kind of compact between the state, the universities and the students, and the tax payers’ (Collini: 2012; 182). Collini is arguing here that the block grant gave independence and flexibility to universities and that all subjects were considered of equal worth and were subsidized regardless of their popularity or use value and that the fee arrangement was a kind of

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<sup>30</sup> *The Just’s Umbrella: Austerity and the Big Society in Coalition policy and beyond*. In Critical Policy (2012)

graduate tax, a progressive deferred payment arrangement. Importantly here, Collini argues that the underwriting of this by the government, along with a subsequent and necessary control on student numbers gave the state a direct financial interest in universities. The Browne Report (2010) suggested that government should cease to play the dominant role in English higher education and seemingly, the Coalition through Browne, attempted to remove the idea of the state in English higher education. Thus again, there is a continuity between the Coalition and the previous administrations of New Labour in the funding of higher education with regards to fees. However, it can be argued following Collini (2012), Morley (2012) and Callender (2013) that the implementation of Browne marked a radical shift in philosophical thinking about higher education and society. So how does the current government explain and justify radical cuts to the funding of public institutions like the university which then as a consequence change their character in the public mind in the way that Morley (*ibid*) suggests?

The economic justification for austerity is explained through the policy known as ‘expansionary fiscal contraction’ (Dorling: 2014a) also known as ‘expansionary austerity’ (IMF: 2011). This is the somewhat contradictory name given to the doctrine with which the Chancellor of the Exchequer chose to deal with the effects of the Great Recession in the UK in 2010. This marked a reversal from the Keynesian approach taken by world leaders in 2009 and following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, which precipitated the Great Recession. The theory underpinning the doctrine of expansionary fiscal contraction asserts that a recovery in the economy will follow from the cutting of taxes (and the additional cutting of interest rates) and the reduction of expenditure on welfare provision and the public services.<sup>31</sup> This is intended to lead to a diminution of what the chancellor called ‘the overblown state’ which he thought was crowding out ‘private endeavour’ (Clark and Heath: 2014: 9). The Chancellor’s statement perhaps provides an insight into the ideological

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<sup>31</sup> See Portes (2013) who argues that in fact the chancellor has slowed the deficit reduction programme and that the government have kick started investment as expansionary austerity has failed and led to a new slump in the economy. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/09/what-osborne-wont-admit-growth-has-increased-because-slower-cuts>

justification for austerity, demonstrating as it does, a philosophical as well as an economic justification for the changes to the funding of public institutions – the belief that the private sector should now be responsible for services previously administered by the state, reducing a collective and cultural good to a private matter in the process<sup>32</sup>. Whether the private sector fills the vacuum or not it is conceivable that this doctrine would, if continued, eventually reduce the ability and capability of the state to maintain its past responsibilities, that is, a functioning bureaucracy, which includes the administration and financial support of universities, amongst a number of other public institutions<sup>33</sup>. So as we have read, it can be argued that the university in England is in fact subject to an ideological assault from a government committed to ending the welfare state and the last notion that the state is the provider of public services, including higher education. However, and as indicated earlier in this section, and from the conclusions of this research project, the reality in English higher education at present does not yet coincide with a coercive and successful ideological change from the political centre of society: the project of neoliberalism. The trebling of fees also failed to have the desired effect of producing the differentiation in the higher education sector one would expect from a market oriented system. Thompson and Bekhradnia (2010) explain the situation like this:

The idea of the withdrawal of the state from the direct funding of universities is deeply ideological. Because of the considerable government subsidy that the new arrangements involve, it is not as if the government is withdrawing from funding higher education or higher education teaching in particular. So it is not as straightforward as a belief that the state has no business in funding such activity. It is instead driven by the belief that the market, and in particular student choice as the manifestation of the market at work, is the best way of ordering things, and to the extent that government funding is to be provided it should be provided in such a way as to increase student choice. Through this other benefits like quality improvement and cost reductions will follow.

[however]

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<sup>32</sup> See Taylor-Gooby and Stoker (2011) and Taylor-Gooby (2012) for a discussion on the retrenchment of the state and public services and the dynamic between economic and political pragmatism and ideology and the consequence of this for citizenship rights.

<sup>33</sup> See IFS report on Chancellor's Autumn Statement 2014 and introductory remarks by Paul Johnson. Page 5, penultimate paragraph.  
[http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/budgets/as2014/as2014\\_johnson.pdf](http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/budgets/as2014/as2014_johnson.pdf)

Even if such a belief in market mechanisms were well founded, the problem for the government at present – a problem that the Browne Committee recognised but was unable to resolve in a plausible way – is that public expenditure constraints will make it very difficult for student choice to be exercised in an unfettered way. Student numbers will have to be constrained as long as there is a public cost for every student that is recruited. That is a conundrum that the government has not yet resolved but which is critical for the coherence of the philosophical justification for its proposals. Thompson and Bekhradnia (2010: 12-13)

In other words, while there is a half-way house between state subsidy and a full-blown market in higher education, the Coalition will be unable to justify a free market approach and will have to find the money to support universities or, presumably, let the market decide once and for all. Indeed, in order to calibrate for what was the failure of the £9,000 fee strategy to introduce a new dimension of competition into English higher education (Wyness: 2013: 89-90), and it is argued, to ‘improve quality’ (*ibid*) and so further stratify the sector through intellectual elitism, the ‘AAB’ system was introduced via the White Paper: *Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS: 2011). This was for the academic year 2012/2013. It was thought that £9,000 would be ‘the absolute limit’ that universities would charge in fees and that this would only be reached in ‘exceptional circumstances’, according to David Willetts the then universities and science minister, furthermore, that the basic threshold on fees would be £6,000 and that fees above this should be subject to a sliding levy (Thompson and Bekhradnia: 2010: 2; 2011; 2). Additionally that, ‘Universities that choose to set fees above £6,000, that is all institutions that were not prepared to see a cut in their unit of resource, would have to enter into an agreement with OFFA on ‘progress each year towards their access benchmarks as calculated by the Higher Education Funding Council’ (Thompson and Bekhradnia: 2010:11). In other words, universities charging more than the basic threshold would have to improve their commitment to widening participation. In the event, most universities decided to charge £9,000 despite the predictions of the universities and science minister and BIS, and the levy was in fact dropped (Watson: 2013: 195).

Thus the AAB system was designed to allow those universities travelling at the top end of the league tables – those considered to be at the top of the league tables for ‘excellence’ in research and teaching under the RAE and subject review – to take as many

students who achieved AAB grades at A-level as they wished, ostensibly outside the normal government controlled student quota. As part of the new 'core-margin' system the government had however, (to be able to control and afford these 'extra' places via student loans), to take places from institutions' normal and total quotas. Thereby, and potentially, making it impossible for some universities to meet their intake targets should fewer than expected AAB students materialize (crucially, universities would be unable to accept students with lower offers). Indeed, this is exactly what happened in August and September 2012 leaving some Russell Group institutions as well as other types of institutions short of students and thus falling short of projected income, whilst some others gained<sup>34</sup>.

The 'margin' element of the new system of quotas intended to take places from the core to give to institutions charging £7,500 or less. These institutions also included colleges of further education and this was an attempt to extend the diversification of the sector and to foster more competition. In the academic year 2012/2013 the number of margin places was fixed at a level of 20,000. This was reduced to 2,000 places for the year 2013/2014 under pressure from the Alliance Group of universities.

According to another research participant, a dean of an arts and humanities faculty, these interventions were made as a consequence of a line of political thinking by some Conservative members of the Coalition who view the ex-polytechnics as second class institutions. The informant surmised that as well as the economic rationale behind the interventions in English higher education, another aspect of the strategy was to deliberately disadvantage post-92 institutions by introducing a competitive environment into higher education in which these modern institutions could not survive in their current guise – at least as universities. To quote:

So that's the technocratic fix that's been put in place in order to keep the costs of loans down, and it's driving that division within the sector and deliberately creating two tiers of institutions. One which will be research orientated and competing for reputation and good students, and one which will be competing

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<sup>34</sup> For figures on the performance of institutions in the then new AAB system See: Morgan and Grove (2012) *Times Higher Education* and Morgan (2013a) *Times Higher Education*.



with FE colleges (dean of the arts and humanities faculty at a suburban London post-92).

Similarly, a registrar at a research intensive university, when asked about the prognosis for the future of the sector, and in particular, the effects of Coalition policy on modern universities, concurred with this view. That is, that the competitive economic market in higher education would stratify the sector according to the academic and vocational. In other words, the modern universities would be forced back down the road towards an existence as pseudo/quasi polytechnics and these would have a concentration on the applied, utilitarian disciplines (Registrar, Russell Group University)<sup>35</sup>. In 2013, the new admissions criterion was relaxed to 3 A-level grades at ABB. The unintended consequences of this policy, which in 2012 saw some leading universities lose student numbers and so resources while others grew led to this further calibration in 2013, a year which saw further growth in some big established elite research intensive universities. Indeed, in turn, one of these universities (Birmingham<sup>36</sup>) circumvented the new market and unconditionally accepted the best students on predicted grades prior to the announcement of A-level results in the coming August of that year to take these outside the now usual university admissions competition of that month, threatening to create a new hierarchy in the English higher education sector. Indeed, since starting this thesis, the Coalition government has announced, via the chancellor's autumn statement (2013), the intention to completely remove the cap on student numbers. This is intended to begin in the academic year 2015/2016. It was widely thought that this was to be financed by the sale of the pre-2012 student loan book to a private financial institution. On 5th December 2013, George Osborne said this: 'Access to higher education is a basic tenet of economic success in the global race. So today I can announce that next year (2014-15) we will provide 30,000 more student places – and the year after we will abolish the cap on student numbers altogether.' (Osborne, in Morgan, in the *Times Higher*

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<sup>35</sup> The interview with this participant is represented through their own words in chapter five.

<sup>36</sup> Callender and Scott (2013: 208, 1) discuss the unevenness of institutions in managing the new funding environment and posit the variable capacity of institutions, and of departments and courses within them as a reason for this. That is, the ability of these institutions to 'manage the complex tripartite system of student number controls'. This year (Grove: *THE*: 2014) it is reported that the most selective universities are growing at twice the rate than those with lower grade boundaries.

*Education*: 2013a). So it seems – at least at first glance - from this remark by the chancellor that competing in the global race is an act that is performed on the individual as well as on the national level. That is to say, and as the chancellor has said, his policies are designed to lift the cap on individual ‘aspiration’ (Morgan: 2013a). However, and from a secondary critical analysis, the chancellor is perhaps acknowledging here that the full force of English higher education is best deployed through the fullest possible participation and that will win the global race for United Kingdom PLC (Public Limited Company). In other words, and in a take on excellence, success in the global race depends on a national collective effort, which presupposes that participation in higher education is also society acting together, as well as individually. The practical questions that have to be asked are, how economically viable is the opening up of higher education to all that are able (the chancellor made reference to the Robbin’s Report principle<sup>37</sup> in his statement) that is, how will it be funded and on what projections of participation is the lifting of the cap made? This is discussed below in the section: Project Hero’. The philosophical questions that perhaps need to be asked are these: how will the utilization of higher education purely for economic gain on the part of the nation and the individual progress society to a stage where the endless pursuit of growth becomes less necessary and where the co-operative and cultural side of life becomes as important as competitive economic society? These questions are of course related to excellence and where in the realm between state and society this emancipatory philosophy sits, and thus these questions, and indeed, thoughts, are returned to throughout the thesis.

### **Project Hero**

The government’s higher education accounting strategy, the resource accounting budget system (RAB), the rubric under which future projected loan defaults are designated, removes the actual and so visible cost of loans by central government to the universities

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<sup>37</sup> In October 2013, a Social Market Foundation pamphlet *Robbins Revisited*, written by the then universities and science minister, David Willetts was published: On the 50th anniversary of the Robbins Report the Coalition argued that they were fulfilling the basic principles of Robbins, that is, that all who are able should be able to participate in higher education and that universities cultivate the mind as well as the skills necessary for the economy. A full critical discursive analysis of the Robbins report is presented in chapter five.

which support the ‘unit of resource’ (the cost of government support for students). Thus the real cost to the government and so tax payer of undergraduate study is factored out of the national budget deficit. Thus it is worth reiterating with this in mind that the government were considering the sale, at least partially, of the loan book to a bank or other financial institution in what would have been an instance of the privatization of public assets and the exiting of the state from responsibility for the administration and provision of higher education. The selling off of the last of the family silver as it has been described, as well as providing a short term boost to the chancellor’s coffers and, the jettisoning of risk in the guise of debt (The Economist: 2013b). Thus in the CSR of June the 26th 2013, the chancellor announced that the income contingent student loans, pre-Browne 2012, would be sold off to a private company or financial institution. ‘Project Hero’ was the name of the feasibility scheme undertaken by Rothschild’s on behalf of the government to look into this. The scheme was intended to underwrite a percentage of this private investment so that in the event that the returns were lower than expected the private institution would not lose money. Dorling shows throughout his work (2014a, 8; 9; 16) that under the Coalition there has been an acceleration in the trend to underwrite private risk with public money, a trend which he states began under New Labour.

However, Vince Cable, the business secretary and Liberal-Democrat deputy leader, along with the deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg has now announced the cancellation of the sell-off after considering that it would not reduce government debt –now stated as the primary rationale for the sale. Indeed there were wider calls for lifting of the cap on student numbers to be cancelled, as the funding mechanism for extra places is no longer there. A report from HEPI (Norton: 2014) which examines the Australian experience of abandoning student controls suggests that the government would be unwise to continue with the plan as the numbers of students taking up places there far exceeds Australian government predictions. The government would have to borrow vast sums of money to subsidize the extra loans in the event that a massive expansion of places were to take place, with all the

consequences that might bring for the debt burden of the government and for inflation as will be discussed shortly.

On the unforeseen consequences of lifting the cap completely Nick Hillman, director of HEPI said this:

Removing student number controls is a logical conclusion of the liberalisation of higher education that has taken place in England under the Coalition. In effect, undergraduates hold vouchers worth £9,000 and universities are expected to compete for them.

But the policy of removing student number caps was put together quickly and remains fuzzy. There are uncanny parallels between the English and Australian higher education systems and, when Australia followed a similar path, the results were unexpected. More students enrolled than were predicted, the costs spiralled and there have been knock-on consequences for the whole higher education debate.

There are strong arguments for giving applicants and universities more freedom to find the best possible match. But it would be naïve to think the policy will be simple to roll out, especially if higher education suffers further cuts after the 2015 election. England rapidly needs to consider the positive and negative lessons from the Australian experience if the policy is to be a success (Nick Hillman HEPI website: 2014)

These factors have prompted the Russell Group<sup>i</sup> of universities in England to ask the government to abandon the idea as extra government expenditure on unforeseen student numbers would undoubtedly deprive the BIS budget in terms of research funding. However, it is also suggested that it is too late (by the Liberal-Democrat leaders) for the sale to be cancelled— this is scheduled for 2016, the year after the next general election - and that the chancellor – presuming the Conservatives win an outright majority in 2015 - is set to press on with lifting the cap as the funding for the initial rise in places is already in place.

### **Instrumentalism**

The removal of the teaching grant in many subjects for example, in the arts, humanities and social sciences and the concentration of the government on STEM, (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects and employment skills, are, as the extracts from Nussbaum (*ibid*) represented at the outset of this introduction show, a cause for concern amongst academics, particularly in the arts and humanities and social sciences. For example, the introduction of considerably higher tuition fees and the implementation of the market

objectives contained in White Paper (BIS: 2011) are viewed as indicating an increasing drift towards the instrumentalization of higher education. That is, for example, through the construction of the student through the NSS and Key Information Sets (KIS)<sup>38</sup> as the consumer, arbiter and the driver of quality in a higher education market, a dynamic driven by the employment market (Barnett: 2013: 73). And indeed it would seem that this instrumentalization is exacerbated, if not driven in the first instance by the global race, that is, if the words of the chancellor quoted above are to be taken at face value and indeed, as representing a fundamental shift in the direction of English higher education. On this point, a HEFCE<sup>39</sup> study, *Data about Demand and Supply in Higher Education Subjects* has shown that despite an 8% drop in undergraduates applying for STEM subjects in the two years to 2012-2013 (arts, humanities and social sciences were down 10% during this period) that acceptances are back up to normal levels with record levels of UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Service) acceptances last year (2013), despite fears before the introduction of £9,000 fees that high cost subjects might not dissuade universities from switching to cheaper and more profitable humanities subjects. Malcom Tight, a professor at the department of educational research at Lancaster, said that ‘the relative success of STEM subjects was to be expected given government funding support for the disciplines’. He said that the rhetoric from government is that ‘STEM is the most important area of study’. And, ‘whereas high-cost subjects still receive teaching grants, other subjects have to survive on their popularity’ (Tight in Matthews and Else, *Times Higher Education*: 2014; 6). However, a research participant interviewed early in 2012 when asked about the Coalition’s emphasis on STEM said this:

As far as the STEM subjects and so forth, the idea of funding research in relation to innovation and the economy, goes back to all those science White papers that the Tories produced, which Labour continued to follow. What

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<sup>38</sup> Key Information Sets were introduced by the White Paper (BIS, 2011: para 2.8) to make course information ‘explicit’ to students and so make higher education more responsive to their needs and, when taken together, student loans or ‘vouchers’, the NSS and KIS now centre higher education around the student, creating a student centred market, and quality – excellence in teaching is ostensibly driven by the student. See Barnett (2013).

<sup>39</sup> See HEFCE website for data on these and all years:  
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2014/Name.94051.en.html>

Willetts is doing now, as minister for science, is straight down the line. All this money going to Graphene<sup>40</sup>: it's straight down the line to what the British Government has been interested in doing for a very long time (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist).

This view of the continuity of government policy and its steering of higher education towards science, technology, engineering and maths suggests that the connecting of the university to the economy by the state through the more applied disciplines is a bi-partisan political project. Perhaps the conclusion we can draw from the greater emphasis on STEM by the government and indeed, by academics on the issue, is that the intended direction of higher education is being made more explicit by the state, and as was suggested earlier through Morley and Collini (*ibid*), the Coalition have been able to use the cover of the recession to intensify a project aimed at gearing the UK to the requirements of global competition.

### **Competition**

The increased competition in English higher education might allow the elite institutions – through what has in intent if not in effect become a variable fee regime in HE, (fee levels are ostensibly dependent on institutional status) to completely move away from state funding – except for their reliance on money from research grants. The registrar at a research intensive university (registrar, Russell Group University) suggested that student fees at elite research intensive universities might in the future be guaranteed by private banks, rather than the student loan company (SLC) and that Russell Group universities had been in contact with Conservative politicians before the 2010 election to discuss this possibility. And thus the government in this scenario would - at least ostensibly – be able to completely remove the state from the equation, and so finally destroy the last vestiges of the idea that the university is a public good worth funding from the public purse.

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Graphene, a novel two-dimensional material which can be seen as a monolayer of carbon atoms arranged in a hexagonal lattice, is one of the world’s most versatile materials. Its potential applications include touchscreen mobile phones, lighter aircraft wings, superfast internet connections and transistors’ Because of its primary application as a super conductor and its incredible thinness and lightness, is also likely to be applied in helping medical conditions such as Parkinson’s, it could then revolutionize medicine. It is strongly supported by the chancellor, George Osborne: <http://www.graphene.manchester.ac.uk/latest.php?archive=twelvemonths&id=11863>

Interestingly, the former universities and science minister, David Willetts has now suggested that individual universities take responsibility for their own students' debts. In other words, universities would buy and hold their own loan books. Nick Hillman of HEPI (2014) has pointed out that this would only incentivize the elite universities such as Oxford who are rich and whose students are guaranteed to make good on their debts, thus unsurprisingly, newer and less well off institutions have expressed disquiet over the proposal<sup>ii</sup>.

Because of planned cuts to the BIS budget in 2015, the current Business Secretary – as well as planning to partially convert grants usually given to the 500,000 poorest students from lower income backgrounds into repayable loans - is in the process of limiting loans and grants to private institutions. The unforeseen cost of these loans are an unintended consequence of the extension of these to the private sector, as the cost of these far exceeds what was originally envisaged, due to the enthusiastic take up at private institutions (Universities UK: 2014). Thus in short, a new government will need to construct a new fees regime after the next general election in 2015, with all the political difficulties for that new administration, whatever its colour, and, for those administering higher education which that process will entail. In anticipating more severe cuts to the budget of BIS, vice-chancellors, particularly those from the Russell Group, have lobbied the government to make changes to the repayment salary threshold for students on their loans, which currently stands at £21,000 and reduce this to £18,000. The rationale for this, as Professor Bar at the LSE points out, is that public debt will not stand the increase from student loans not repaid in time and defaulted on completely (Bar: 2012; Johnston, Alison and Barr, Nicholas: 2013). Additionally, and as Bekhradnia (*Times Higher Education*: 2014) points out, 'the Institute for Fiscal Studies has also suggested that the repayment threshold could be lowered to £18,000, which would shrink the loan write-off rate to 37 per cent but that would of course [while alleviating government debt] greatly increase the burden on graduates'. Moreover, Bekhradnia (2014) argues that, 'Only if we abandon ideology and revert to good sense and a more balanced approach will we achieve sustainability of funding for our universities'.

Indeed, all these new policy interventions, implemented and planned, have had and could have profound implications for the English higher education sector in the future, as it is unlikely that newer institutions would be able to compete with those more established ones if competition were intensified even further: the new and radical policy intervention of lifting the number cap might – if it were to go ahead - also herald the abolition of the fee cap entirely as McGettigan (2013) and Palfreyman and Tapper (2014) have predicted. Changes in Australian higher education are said to be a good predictor for English higher education and this is precisely what is proposed there and despite the warnings the government seems determined to press ahead. The Director of HEPI said this:

Coalition Government are currently implementing changes, such as removing number controls, that are close to recent Australian reforms without always having detailed knowledge about them. It would be a dereliction of duty by those with responsibility for higher education policy if they were to ignore Australia and it is HEPI's role to build evidence, encourage understanding and aid policymakers. (Nick Hillman in foreword to Norton: 2014)

So if fees were lifted along with the number cap this could in the UK, in theory at least, lead to the effective privatization of the elite universities as these break away from the rest of the sector, charging fees which newer institutions could not justify and so forcing these to offer cut price utilitarian degrees to those heading straight to the labour market. As well as creating an increasingly instrumental feel to a sector of the higher education system, this might also create a new division between the older established institutions and smaller newer universities which could become the poorer 'public' relations (Hickey and Holmwood in *The Times Higher Education*: 2014). This might then lead to the creation of a new binary system in English higher education, in which the latter institutions are considered purely vocational and the former, academic, and thus the preserve of the intellectual 'elite'. The implication of this is that poorer students who already find accessing higher education difficult because of socio-economic and educational factors will be further prevented from fully participating in higher education.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> This argument is further developed in chapter five through research interview material.



However, the current funding interventions and consequent intensification of competition in English higher education by the state, an unsustainable student loan repayment system, which is in fact still funded by the state and thus the tax payer (HEPI: 2012; McGettigan: 2013; Bekhradnia: 2014) have been compounded by the following: stringent new policies to reduce net immigration, which have deterred international students<sup>iii</sup> and which has been exacerbated by the rising cost of postgraduate<sup>42</sup> study which also affects domestic students (Whitty and Mullan: 2013: 176); the deterrence of mature students<sup>43</sup> because they already have an equivalent lower degree (ELQ) and so cannot find funding; the on-going problem of access and participation for those from the poorer socio-economic groups, following the abandoning of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), a fund for teenagers in pre-university study; and, the ending of AimHigher, the widening participation project, by the universities and science minister in 2010. Interestingly, and on the issue of widening participation, a research participant, a professor of higher education, said this in early 2013:

You may get more rhetoric from Labour about widening participation, but it's not much more than rhetoric. Now what we see, the latest UCAS figures show that the widening participation figures are continuing to improve in spite of the new fee structure. They've gone up again slightly, according to the January figures. Now, it's too early to say, but I'm not sure that a lot of the perceptions about widening participation are based on very sound research. One would be much better looking at it in terms of regions, areas of acute economic disadvantage for schools. There are quite a lot of schools that just never send anybody into higher education. One needs to probe all that a lot more than is currently being done (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist).

Vignoles (2013: 117; 122), who points out that after the White Paper (BIS: 2011) the onus to widen participation remained with colleges and universities, shows that this is precisely what the AimHigher scheme did, and in fact it had switched its focus to earlier

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<sup>42</sup> In fact and since first writing of the thesis the Chancellor has announced funding for postgraduates through a loan system offering £10,000 to young students. See: Morgan (2014,b) <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/postgraduate-loans-of-10k-announced-by-george-osborne/2017368.article>

<sup>43</sup> See Callender (2013) who discusses the problems that part-time students, who are often mature, face because of a disproportionate fee and cost sharing repayment system. Increasing access for part-time students was one of the six key principles informing the Browne Report

stages of schooling in light of evidence that showed disparity in educational achievement in those children from the lowest socio-economic groups begins early in life. Vignoles (2013: 121) goes on to say that the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and AimHigher is likely to impact on attempts to widen participation. However, in a caveat and citing research from Harrison (2012), she states that it is unclear that abolishing AimHigher will have a negative impact on widening participation and thus the access of young people from poorer backgrounds to higher education, as the evidence shows the scheme was found not to have a major impact on this group. However, she goes on to say that because the scheme switched its focus to a much younger age group it may not be known for some time whether there is in fact a negative impact to its abandonment<sup>44</sup>. So the decision to abandon the AimHigher scheme may or may not impact young people in the future, but what can perhaps be said is that the decision was taken without clear evidence either way. It is reasonable to surmise after all that if researchers and policy specialists in higher education do not have the evidence then government does not either. Indeed, Watson (2013:195) in discussing the implementation of the White Paper (BIS:2011) as being the eleventh new ‘framework’ for UK higher education since the *Robbins Report* of 1963, states that it ‘exhibits the characteristic mixture throughout this half-century of reform of brittle certainty, uncertainty, and evidence free gambling on the outcomes’. In fact, as Harrison (2012) has argued, the decision to abandon AimHigher was made because of a mistake in evaluating its success and through the use of a government sanctioned statistic. To quote: ‘it was at least partly due to a confusion in the implementation of the policy aim leading, inter alia, to the late adoption of a poor outcome measure that underestimated improvements in participation from the target groups and focused on the wrong stage of entry to higher education’

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<sup>44</sup> In fact the evidence supports Vignoles in this argument: although still far outweighed by those from better off families and less likely to access elite universities, applications from students from poorer backgrounds are up. However, it is not (yet) known when and what motivated these students. See: <http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/07/OFFA-2014.01.pdf>

(Harrison: 2012; introduction), suggesting that at least a degree of ineptitude as well as recklessness has been involved in the implementation of policy<sup>45</sup>.

Shortly after the initial interventions and reforms of higher education by the Coalition (the trebling of tuition fees and then calibration of the AAB and core-margin etc., in the 2011 White Paper), a vice-chancellor interviewed for this study (Vice-chancellor and widening participation leader), said that the strategy of BIS represented a mish-mash of incoherent policy initiatives and interventions in higher education. He was asked why in his opinion this approach to the English university had been taken, including the abandonment of the AimHigher scheme and, why were unintended consequences or ‘collateral effects’ (Callender and Scott: 2013: 207) arising from policy and, why might they again in the future. He replied that the politicians in charge of universities simply did not understand higher education, as indeed did the vice-chancellor of a big civic and at the time, a representative of Universities UK, and had not properly consulted the leaders of the university, had not listened to warnings about the course of their reforms, and thus they were simply inept in their policy implementation (Vice-Chancellor and representative of Universities UK). However, a professor of higher education (former vice-chancellor at a modern university) and policy expert said that the problem was more complicated. He said that a complex interaction had culminated in the Coalition’s interventions in higher education. First, the economic crisis had provided the pretext for an ideological assault on the public services and higher education had suffered disproportionately on this account, although some cuts in public services were necessary because of the recession. Second, this policy expert argued that the universities and science ministers and other Coalition politicians believed they were continuing the project of Margaret Thatcher to introduce a market in all areas of social-life, a project which they believed had not gone far enough under her leadership, thus accordingly, the reforms to higher education are to be considered

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<sup>45</sup> In fact AimHigher has now been replaced by a very similar scheme but with considerably less funding than its predecessor: The National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2015/news99631.html>

ideological<sup>46</sup>. Third, and importantly, politicians on all sides had felt bullied by the dominant Russell Group prior to the 2010 general election when they had threatened to go private unless the fee cap was raised and thus the Coalition had implemented the Browne Report<sup>47</sup>. Fourthly, the Browne Report was written by a business man who simply could not see the difference between higher education and any other commodity and believed that it would respond to market forces as such. Finally, this policy expert argued that many of the leaders of the influential universities, for example, those that sat on the Browne Review<sup>48</sup>, were as uninformed about higher education as politicians have been argued to be (former vice-chancellor at post-1992 University and widening participation leader), and indeed, are self-interested in respect of their own institutions. The argument that the government has been inept in its implementation of policy is one also put forward in a work by Toynbee and Walker in *Dogma and Disarray: Cameron at half-time* (2012) which makes a wider analysis of the failures of policy implementation by the Coalition. Moreover, and as was argued above, the post-92 head said that the Liberal-Democrats had tempered the more right-wing thinking of the Conservatives resulting in an approach to higher education that was neither here, nor there. (former Vice-chancellor and widening participation leader). Callender and Scott (2013: 206) argue that tempting though it is, it is unfair to describe the Coalition's reforms to higher education as a shambles or include them as part of the government's wider policy and strategy failures dubbed the 'omnishambles'. They argue that 'politicians genuinely aspire to make strategic decisions but are fiercely constrained by tactical considerations' like those facing the Conservative – Liberal – Democrat Coalition. Conversely, however, McGettigan (2012) does describe the Coalition reforms to higher

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<sup>46</sup> A dean of the arts and humanities faculty at a suburban London post-92 also argued that universities were undergoing an ideological assault and said that this had been thought through, i.e. it was considered before the general election.

<sup>47</sup> The vice-chancellor and registrar at a leading 'entrepreneurial' Russell Group university said during interviews that it was the case that they had been in talks with Conservative politicians prior to the general election and that talks about uncapped fees and funding from private financial institutions to underwrite fees had taken place. (However, to the surprise of these universities, the Coalition capped fees at £9,000 instead of removing it completely).

<sup>48</sup> This argument is examined further in chapter five in the context of a critique of the Browne Report and the presentation of research material from a vice-chancellor who sat on the Browne Review panel. The argument is in part refuted by the research interview material.

education as a 'shambles', because they will not achieve the savings that the government promised they would. In fact, they may, as this thesis argues along with McGettigan *et al.*, cost more in the long run and indeed, they may have more unforeseen, thus unintended consequences other than those outlined above, including on participation which the White Paper (BIS: 2011) set out to improve. Indeed, the possible unforeseen and unintended consequences of the Coalition's policy on this aspect of excellence is illustrated through research interview material in chapter five.

### **Conclusion: ideology, incoherence and compromise**

Thus it is possible to conclude from the arguments and evidence presented above that the current state of English higher education is the consequence of a number of factors. Firstly, it is certain that the Conservative-led Coalition came to power determined to find savings to cut the budget deficit and at the same time fulfil a philosophical project to implement a market in higher education. It is generally accepted that the Conservatives view the market as the best model on which to order society. Secondly, it is more than arguable that there is also a deeply held ideological view in the Coalition which takes the view that the inefficient and wasteful state should be rolled back further. Thus there is an economic critique of the state synonymous with neoliberalism. This view is held by some, not on simple economic grounds, but because of a deep belief that the redistributive state has failed the individual and society and thus the services it ran previously should be handed over to what is considered the more efficient private sector and to social entrepreneurs. Thirdly, it is also the case that the interventions in English higher education have been implemented as a compromise between the Conservative and Liberal-Democrat parties. The elephant in the room, so to speak, is the absence of legislation on higher education, said to be on hold because of the political difficulty it would cause the leadership of the Coalition were it to come to a vote in the house of commons after the Liberal-Democrats were so badly damaged following the violent and vociferous student demonstrations following the vote on the fee rise in 2010. Finally, the current state of English higher education can be said to be the consequence of policy failure. That is to say, that the interventions were made to higher

education by a government without proper consideration as to how universities would respond to fees, and without proper economic consideration for the future of the sector. Earlier, in discussing the proposals by the chancellor to lift the cap on student numbers, Nick Hillman (*ibid*) was quoted as saying this: ‘Coalition Government are currently implementing changes, such as removing number controls, that are close to recent Australian reforms without always having detailed knowledge about them’. He also said this: ‘... the policy of removing student number caps was put together quickly and remains fuzzy. There are uncanny parallels between the English and Australian higher education systems and, when Australia followed a similar path, the results were unexpected’. Perhaps Hillman has given us a metaphor here for the original reforms made to English higher education by the Coalition, that is – ‘the reforms were put together quickly and remain fuzzy’ (*ibid*): As the former Chief of Staff and then Special Adviser for David Willetts, the Minister for Universities and Science, from 2007 until the end of 2013, in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Hillman now admits the Coalition got their sums wrong, despite being warned that they were so in the first instance by a number of organisations and institutions, including the one he now directs. (Mason, Malik and Ball in *The Guardian*: 2014).

In sum then, the current state of English higher education with regard to policy implementation is arguably one of political, philosophical and, economic incoherence, although there is as discussed at the outset of this chapter, a definite coherence between the Coalition government and past administrations in terms of the ideology of the market. That is, and as this study has showed, a continuous line in political thought and action in government policy in English higher education between 1979 and the present day which mirrors policy on wider society and which seeks to implement a market in higher education, however unsuccessfully.<sup>49</sup> At the start of this discussion on why policy was formulated and then implemented as it was by the Coalition, Scott (2013:33) was quoted to show how the

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<sup>49</sup> See HEC report *Too Good to Fail: The Financial Sustainability of Higher Education in England* (2014) which criticizes the sham market implemented by the Coalition and states that the commission found that present levels of uncertainty and risk mean the future financial sustainability of the current funding model is far from guaranteed.

Liberal-Democrat presence in government might have influenced this. Scott goes on to discuss ‘a second and more significant reason’ for the discrepancy between the Browne recommendations and the White Paper produced by the Coalition in 2011, nine months after the Browne Report (2010) and which announced the policies that would be adopted by the government. Scott refers to the ‘new model’ (*ibid*) of policy formation which has its origins in the 1980s under Mrs Thatcher and which has a number of characteristics. This, Scott states, is an analogue of the more celebrated ‘New Public Management’: first, a heightened degree of ideological dogmatism which reflects the decay of and/ or replaces the post-war settlement (if the latter, this through neoliberalism). Second, a distrust of traditional forms of professional expertise (this as we have seen could apply as well to higher education policy specialists as to Browne), third, the greater pressures of [modern] politics which demand instant results and fourth, and perhaps of most importance with regard to the arguments of this thesis on the Coalition’s delivery of policy, ‘a focus on policy delivery rather than a focus on policy formation’. In risking over-simplifying Scott’s presentation of this theory, this is the belief that the drawing of the ideological line is more important than considering different options. In other words, the presentation of dogma and drawing political boundaries around policy is more important than getting policy right in the long term. And although different options on policy still need to be considered, the primary role has shifted from government to ‘on-message think-tanks’, broadly aligned with political parties and, furthermore, that policy is managed for the benefit of ‘stakeholders’ through the pre-determined orchestration of their views, drowning out ‘genuine expressions of opinion’. A research participant said this during an interview in which questions concerning the rationale behind the Coalition’s wider policy initiatives were asked:

The way policy works is that political parties outsource the thinking to think-tanks, and the think tanks come back and say, “We’ve got this thing called the Big Society would you like it?” Social mobility is one of those, like fairness and that kind of agenda [it]all comes out of that kind of thinking (dean of arts and humanities faculty at suburban London post-92).

The bottom line in Scott's presentation of this management model is that policy is delivered for short-term advantage, - for the sake of presentation, that is public relations - for the benefit of vested interests and without consideration for long term structural change, and that this is done through management consultants more attuned to the commercial sector with little understanding of public sector policy. This is of course a management model theory and the dynamics of the Coalition government as outlined here tend to suggest that a more complex and multi-factorial explanation of Coalition policy in English higher education is required. However, in terms of a sustainable future for higher education, there does seem that there is a lack of cogency in planning this, although this is apparent on both sides of the political divide. An Institute for Fiscal Studies Report for Universities UK (IFS R86: 2013<sup>50</sup>) indicates that the future for English higher education remains very uncertain. And perhaps without knowing which party will win the next election<sup>51</sup>, whether reforms announced recently but yet to be implemented will come to fruition, if indeed the Conservative party is re-elected, and, where the money will come from to fund it, this is not surprising.

So if uncertainty (Callender and Scott: 2013; 208) is the political and economic state of English higher education at present what is its philosophical state, that is, as viewed from inside the academy? This thesis goes on to discuss this in the final section of this chapter *Apocalypse or Excellence* shortly. First however, in closing this section of writing and by reconsidering the political context English higher education finds itself in, a further analysis of the ideological position of the Coalition can be presented, by again briefly discussing the concept of neoliberalism through Davies (2014). Thus, and perhaps in contradiction to the specific model offered by Scott (2013), and yet at the same time underscoring the argument, Davies (2014: vii) argues that economic and political uncertainty is the hallmark of neoliberalism, that is, competition is the name of the game and we are buffeted by

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<sup>50</sup> See Report at: <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r86.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Since the first writing of the thesis, the Labour Party have announced that if they were to win the general election then tuition fees would be reduced to £6000, paid for in part by the ending of tax relief from high earning pensions.



competing forces, actors and policies under the auspices of a state, ‘and a model of political economy that has incorporated uncertainty at its heart, but nevertheless elevated certain types of expertise and government as guarantees of that uncertainty’. In a similar way to which Scott argues that the drawing of the ideological line is more important than considering different options, Davies argues that the key definition of neoliberalism is the way in which the rhetoric of competition alone sustains it and that ‘neoliberalism is the pursuit of the *‘the disenchantment of politics by economics’*. This is, states Davies (2014: 2-3), because ‘the central defining characteristic of neoliberal critique is its hostility to the ambiguity of political discourse and its commitment to the explicitness and transparency of quantitative, economic indicators of which the market price system is the model’. Thus, and in finally concluding this section of chapter one, which has sought to understand the Coalition reforms, and in doing so, weighing up Davies’s definition of neoliberalism against these, it is possible to make the conclusion that this might indeed be the aim of the Conservative-led Coalition, given the explicitly market-led interventions in higher education and indeed, in other public services. However, it is possible to argue that this is far from being an accomplished fact in higher education, precisely because of the plural political and economic logics which Davies (*ibid*) cites as a caveat to his central definition of neoliberalism, and indeed because of some of the very same issues which have been discussed throughout this section on the current state of English higher education. That is the failure of policy – mediated by plural political and economic logics and indeed, political ambiguity – to achieve the desired end of the state, a market in higher education. Given this current political state of English higher education, the future really is then, uncertain; through the uncertainty of competition it is still for imagining and creating – this is, perhaps, the real defining central characteristic and so the mastery of neoliberalism. And this is also perhaps arguably, the spatio-temporal world of as yet unknown opportunity in which the English university finds itself able to make a political argument for excellence as it sees it. In discussing what they deem to be distinctive about political discourse and proceeding from a definition taken from political theory, Fairclough and Fairclough state that ‘politics is

oriented towards decision-making that can ground action'. Moreover, that 'decisions are taken in conditions of disagreement, uncertainty and risk, which make *deliberation* with others, and ideally democratic deliberation, essential in arriving at a reasonable decision' (Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012; 22). Hence, this thesis argues that the ideal speech situation would be a space in which *democratic deliberation* over higher education and differences in its desired end and the interpretation of excellence could take place. This position is developed in the theory and methods chapter (chapter three) as well as in chapter six through the research interview material conducted for this thesis. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012:24) argue that politics is about action and not simply constructing political, economic and discursive imaginaries, it is about changing the world so that it matches a political imaginary and that this is pursued argumentatively – discursively. Thus in following Fairclough and Fairclough this thesis proceeds in constructing arguments which are concomitant to its central premise. That is to say, that as excellence is argued here to be an emancipatory legitimating principle of English higher education, it is thus, a political imaginary, and so following on from some now established discussions on the future of the university and its direction, the next section discusses how the pursuit of the imaginary might be pursued discursively.

### **Apocalypse or Excellence?**

The previous section represents a critical synopsis of the current situation in English higher education and as such it is of course partial and indeed, given the theoretical perspective of this thesis, perhaps even partisan in its analysis. The real picture is of course much more complex as the remainder of this thesis attempts to show. The thesis argues that the current state of the English higher education is the consequence of political and philosophical change over decades, and perhaps it could be argued, in one way or another, over 150 years (Vernon:2004<sup>52</sup>). And thus concerns over how political policy impact on the university are perennial. Ten years ago, under the political administration of a different

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<sup>52</sup> *Universities and the state in England, 1850 – 1939* by Vernon (2004): page numbers refer to the Kindle mobile version of his book.

colour and on the eve of the first trebling of tuition fees, Keith Vernon wrote this caricature of the prevailing feeling in English higher education, in his work *Universities and the state in England, 1850 - 1939*:

Apocalyptic accounts foretell the end of the university, the final demise of an institution that has lasted for centuries, but which now faces a fundamental threat to its essential nature. The state has become too interventionist, undermining traditional academic freedom and institutional autonomy in a drive to subordinate higher education mechanistically to the supposed needs of the economy. All ideals of the disinterested pursuit of truth, the integrity of academic disciplines, the independent critique of established ideas and the formation of brilliant young minds have been abandoned in favour of the production line inculcation of transferable skills in a lumpen student mass, serving a philistine society... ... (Vernon: 2004: 1)

This has often been the refrain of the university or perhaps more accurately, the perceived refrain of a university in crisis. Collini: (2012:20), argues that the debate on higher education and ‘what needs to be done’ to it centres around two positions at opposite ends of the emotionally fuelled opinion spectrum. First, the position of ‘the mournful idiom’ that, like the one parodied in Vernon’s sketch, sees the demise of liberal university and culture and the loss of academic freedom. This position, Collini argues, rests on ‘unexamined claims’ - historical imaginaries about what the university used to be like. At the other end of the spectrum exists the ‘upbeat idiom of the brave new world’ which sees the interventions connecting the university ever more closely to industry, the market and greater accountability as an exciting opportunity with which to engage. Collini goes on to argue (2012: 23) that those supportive of the first position tend to try and argue that there is a definite Idea of the university and that this is usually centred around and based on Newman’s *The Idea of a University*.<sup>53</sup> Going on to quote Rothblatt<sup>54</sup>, Collini (*ibid*) argues that efforts to define the ideal of English higher education attempt to join principles and values that have different historical origins and acutely different cultural meanings and purposes. However, this thesis argues that perhaps the real danger of the two extremes

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<sup>53</sup> See Scott (1993: 4) who states that ‘John Henry Newman’s classic account, *The Idea of a University*, was an attempt to define an ideal type which he did not recognize in the booming universities of Victorian Britain’.

<sup>54</sup> See: *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: An Essay in History and Culture*. (London, Faber, 1976)

Collini outlines is that they risk obscuring and eclipsing a discussion of excellence. Thus this thesis sets out through a critical examination of the historical development of English universities, and the research interview aspect of the study in particular, to find an understanding of what the current state of English higher education is and was, whilst arguing that excellence is the legitimating principle of English higher education. Indeed, it argues, perhaps in contradistinction to Collini, that there is and was an idea of English higher education which transcends different historical and cultural origins but yet is definite and connects the university to the state through excellence and this is defined as the Hellenic ideal<sup>55</sup>. However, rather than this framing the English university as an institution which is integral to mutually reciprocating competitive economic society, that is a servant of capitalism, the thesis argues that excellence is the liberating force which in a dialectic between state and university helps to transform society in an on-going progression towards emancipation. Indeed, as a subsidiary argument, the thesis argues through research that the ideal of excellence has become a more integral part of the university as participation has increased and as more institutions have joined English higher education as universities. Thus it is as though excellence becomes more powerful as higher education grows – in dialectic like progression. The thesis speculates that there are opportunities in the current political situation for excellence to become the predominant legitimating principle of English higher education and therefore it perhaps fits to some extent with the ‘upbeat idiom of the brave new world’ (*ibid*) theorised by Collini.

Since Barnett (1990: 5) commented on the dearth of work in the academy focusing on ‘the idea’ of the university, political and economic interventions have prompted the writing of a voluminous literature on the purpose of higher education. In particular, the radical changes made to domestic higher education made by the Coalition and indeed, changes made in higher education globally and have prompted a number of new works on the university in England which are in the same vein as Collini’s *What are universities for?* and

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<sup>55</sup> See Barnett (1990: 17) who argues that there are elements of higher education which run across centuries. (Barnett presents Plato here to demonstrate the idea of Greek higher education and the emancipatory liberal conception which can be identified within this).

many others which represent an ongoing concern with higher education<sup>56</sup>. For example, *Being a University*, Ronald Barnett, 2011; *The Future University: Ideas and Possibilities*, Barnett (Ed.), 2012; *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution*, Docherty, 2011; *A Manifesto for the Public University* Holmwood, 2011; *Reshaping the University: The Rise of the Regulated Market in Higher Education*, David Palfreyman and Ted Tapper, 2014; *Imagining the University*, Ronald Barnett (2013b), and *Browne and Beyond: Modernizing English higher education*, Clare Callender and Peter Scott (Eds.), 2013. These works propose and provoke a rethink on how universities should be thought of in the future and what their relationship to the state should be. Others critique the Coalition's changes to higher education. For example, books such as *Everything for Sale? The Marketisation of UK Higher Education* by Roger Brown and Helen Carasso, 2013 and *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education*, by Andrew McGettigan, 2013. As a doctoral thesis this study can perhaps be thought of as following on from this new wave of work on higher education, questioning state policy and putting forward a new imaginary of the university, but one which seeks to keep alive the idea of the university as an affirmative project for society and yet still, for the state also (Small: 2013). This would go some way to addressing the political question (Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012) raised by the positioning of higher education in the global race and in the economic crisis. That is, the way in which the discourse of the global race privileges the economic imperative – the political discourse of excellence and economic competition and success - over societal development and thus human flourishing, a state of affairs which the thesis suggests as a subsidiary argument should be reversed.

Through its research interview stage this thesis asked how some of those that work in the institution – often leaders of English higher education - view life in the modern English university and through these responses it argues that although current state of English higher education is witnessing radical changes, excellence is still a legitimating principle of the

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<sup>56</sup> See Halsey (1992: 45) where Moberly's *The Crisis in the University* (1949) is cited as an early discussion on the purposes of the university.

institution. The thesis also uses a government and institutional documentary sources to make a critical and political discourse analysis of policy in higher education and of excellence. Indeed, by looking at government sources it is possible to show how excellence is embedded in the notion of higher education and that the relationship of state and the university is more nuanced than ‘apocalyptic’ (*ibid*) accounts of the university would suggest to us. The following and final section of this first chapter attempts to show how government communications can subordinate the transformative message of excellence in their linguistic constructions, and that despite claims which seem to contradict the argument, the state itself is still wedded to ‘excellence’

So, another subsidiary argument of this thesis is as follows: the liberal-humanist message contained in excellence and interpreted through the Hellenic ideal has been eclipsed through time by the economic imperatives of the state. Moreover, it argues that it is eclipsed now by the exigencies of the global race and the language that surrounds this imperative. And indeed, we can see this in the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)<sup>57</sup> funding Letter for 2013 (BIS: 2013; 1, a) which introduces itself by mixing a number of messages which seek to legitimate higher education by stating that:

We are determined to promote and protect our universities by creating the financial and other incentives that enable successful, autonomous institutions to thrive. We value learning for its own sake and for the enormous social, cultural and economic benefits it brings. Through its teaching and research and its creation and exchange of knowledge, higher education supports economic performance and competitiveness and plays a pivotal role in increasing social mobility (BIS: 2013; 1, a).

Thus here, the liberal philosophy of higher education is combined with the necessity of economic performance and competitiveness which then, perhaps paradoxically, given the accepted inequality of capitalism (Davies: 2014: 37), enhances social mobility, thus underpinning the utilitarian role of the university, and thereby, connecting one cultural ideal of higher education to the economy. The first sentence of this extract seeks to promise the funding and protection of universities as autonomous institutions by introducing financial

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<sup>57</sup> See HEFCE website for this and grant letters before and since:  
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/govletter/>

and other incentives, suggesting that there is independence in the mission of higher education but that this is best served by the competition introduced through the Coalition's reforms. Thus this can be seen as reinforcing the simplistic interpretation of excellence defined as high in quality in the areas of teaching and research, which as a consequence signifies excellence as a measurement by which to rank universities. The following extract from the letter (BIS: 2013; 4, a) which quotes the Government's 'Industrial Strategy' and alludes to the 'global race' via the invocation of the competitive economic advantage of British industries however, suggests that the university in England is, to the mind of government at least, more aligned to political and economic policy than the first extract would suggest.

In September 2012 we launched the Industrial Strategy, setting out the Government's vision for building the competitive advantage of British industries. This long-term strategic plan for growth will put in place foundations to allow our companies to build and grow in future and ultimately rebalance the economy. Higher Education is both an enabler of growth in other sectors and a significant export sector in its own right (BIS: 2013; 4, a).

The letter – in its very last paragraph - goes on to state that:

We recognise that our universities are one of our most valuable national assets. Higher education transforms people's lives through excellent teaching and transforms society through research and the application of knowledge. The Government's reforms have laid the foundations for a more securely funded, stronger, more confident and more responsive higher education sector. We will continue to work with the Council and the sector to communicate the enduring value of higher education to potential students and the wider world. (BIS: 2013; 8, a)

Here, whilst stating that higher education is one of the nation's most valuable assets, a transformative force in the way that it transforms people's lives and society through teaching, research and the application of presumably, new knowledge, the letter acknowledges that excellence is indeed the liberating force found in the Hellenic ideal and that it is in fact a legitimating principle of contemporary English higher education. However, the extract then goes on to say that transformation will be achieved because of the Government's reforms which have made the higher education sector more responsive. Firstly, it is unlikely that the Government's reforms have made higher education in England

more responsive as the interventions made to date by the Coalition are not considered to have been successful as has been argued in this first chapter. Secondly, and presumably, this means that universities are more responsive to the needs of government and economic policy, suggesting in turn that the transformation of lives and wider society is concomitant to some considerable extent to the primary purpose of intensifying competitive economic society in the UK. The letter ends by promising to communicate the enduring message of higher education to potential students and the wider world. However, research for this study into higher education, particularly material obtained through research interviews, suggested that the overriding public argument put forward in support of higher education was one underscoring its economic utility, thereby eclipsing the transformative message of excellence. For example, and to repeat a quote from the vice-chancellor represented at the start of this introductory chapter:

I think what singles out truly excellent universities is their most important outputs, [that is] their students, the quality of their students, what their students go on to do. Not necessarily the level of award that they get, but what they do, how their experience has changed them.

He then went on to say this:

The quality of their research and their output, and the impact of that research. That's what excellence is about. The quality of the wider impact of a university, in terms of concrete outcomes. [the vice-chancellor here refers to the value of his university to the political economy] What does this university do for the local, national economy? We do about half a billion. We've measured it. We contribute half a billion to our local economy here. That's very concrete thinking. (Vice-Chancellor of 1994 group Robbins University).

So in this example, here is a vice-chancellor who recognises excellence as transformative but who then goes on to underscore the economic utility of higher education after stating, rather paradoxically, that what singles out excellent universities is 'the quality of its students – not what awards they go on to get – but how the experience has changed them' and then, 'that the quality of their research is important – and their output, and the impact of that research. That's what excellence is about'. 'The quality of the wider impact of a university, in terms of concrete outcomes' (*ibid*). Thus there seem to be some mixed messages on excellence coming from the leaders of higher education and these tend to



subordinate excellence to competition; producing the best research outcomes which have impact and fulfil the requirements of the economic imperative, locally as well as nationally. Thus the transformational elements of excellence are subordinated to the political discourse of excellence.

The theoretical approach taken to support excellence as the predominant legitimating principle of English higher education is set out in chapter three on theory and methods. In doing so, the thesis also sets out the philosophical position of Habermas and presents a concept of the university that is inextricably linked to wider society, the state and the economy, whilst retaining its role as a critical transcendent institution wedded to the emancipatory ideal of excellence. Firstly however, the thesis continues with a review of the literature which also further sets out the structure of the thesis.

## **Chapter two: review of the literature**

### **Conceptual framework of thesis**

The thesis was in part inspired and driven by an independent desire to understand the origins and meaning of excellence which has become the ubiquitous sign of the university and indeed, one which is often criticised as being empty of meaning. The thesis however argues that excellence represents an individual and collective emancipatory ideal which is a legitimating principle of English higher education. The argument is that excellence is a developmental and transformative force for students, academics and the community and that this dynamic force is part and parcel of the everyday life of the university. Therefore, the thesis was also inspired in part, by a desire to counter the critique of excellence made by Readings (1996), although it was also inspired by the encouragement of the early participants of this research project who gave countless helpful clues which helped in the discovery of excellence in the literature of Aristotle and, in the academy itself. This review of the literature cannot of course cover all the works cited in the thesis, however, it does set out to provide its conceptual and argumentative framework for the reader.

So, Reading's *The University in Ruins* (1996) is perhaps the most notable of works on excellence to date. Readings conceptualized excellence as a technocratic discourse which is indicative and (or) demonstrative of a bureaucratic institution bereft of moral purpose. The university as a place of liberal education is dead and exists as a totally administered and managed enterprise, under the auspices of total quality management (TQM) in a post-historical globalized world, in which Americanization is a metaphor for the imposition of the cash-nexus, (the rule of the exchange principle in everyday life over non-material pursuits); and the idea that culture should be inculcated by the nation state is an anachronism and consumerism is king in higher education. Excellence is a simplistic synonym for quality in Reading's work, then, which is imposed upon the university in and via an endless series of quality and performance tests, measurements and rankings, which invokes the sense of an inexorable exercise in discipline and surveillance in higher education.

The discourse of excellence is emptied of meaning – and it is ‘dereferentialised’: it has no referent as it has no content and so its use signifies nothing other than an acknowledgement by those in the University that the academy is at the beck and call of transnational capitalism which exercises power through a Foucauldian, Panopticon like gaze over quality control in the academy (Morley: 2003; 53). The University has become an accounting house, where the exchange principle has primacy of place, and the institution functions like a transnational corporation in the service of the state, and not as a reproducer of national heritage or for the purposes of the symmetrical cultural development of the individual, but simply as another corporate player in the system of global capitalism.

Readings examined the social role of the University from the perspective of a professor in the humanities, once the original site of reason, which was then superseded by culture, if that is, one traces the origins of the modern university back to the philosophy of the German idealists, Kant, Humboldt and Schiller and from where, perhaps arguably, the socio-political mission of the modern University is originally derived (Delanty: 1996; 2001). Readings argues that the original Enlightenment mission of the University is dead: the project of humanity has been superseded by global capitalism and in this arena the university markets itself through an embrace with a flattened discourse of excellence, in its mission statements and all other internal documents and communiqués. In contrast to this thesis, excellence does not, according to Readings, represent the ideological discourse of the economic imperative, but rather, excellence is used as a metaphor to represent the empty shell of the once formerly prestigious and learned institution dedicated to the noble tradition of liberal education whether via reason, cultural enlightenment or literary criticism. However, this thesis argues that excellence defined as a transformational ideal is a historical and, a contemporary legitimating principle of the English university. This is argued for in chapters four, five and six through a critical analysis of literature which focuses on the historical development of the English university and then through a critical discourse analysis of three government reports as well as research interview material. The Robbins Report (1963), The Dearing Report (NCIHE) 1997 and finally the Browne Report of 2010, a

report which this thesis begins and ultimately ends with, and through this critique, and with reference to the title of the thesis, it questions the notion that English higher education or indeed, excellence is in crisis. The critique of the Browne Report and subsequent government White Paper (BIS: 2011) is made partly through contemporary literature (Barnett: 2013; Collini: 2013; Callender and Scott: 2013; Callender; 2013; Vignoles: 2013) and supported by research interview material which is represented to support the fundamental argument of this thesis that excellence is an emancipatory ideal and as such is a legitimating principle of English higher education.

### **The thesis**

Thus the thesis began by presenting the concept which is at the heart of this doctoral research project: excellence. The thesis defines excellence as the Aristotelean Hellenic ideal (Aristotle: 2009) which is interpreted here as a virtue of industrious human activity (*arête*) to which all can aspire. In education it is an exceptional achievement which the individual as part of the wider collective aspires to in reaching for the dizzy heights of self-improvement, self-development, which in turn induces happiness, a sense of fulfilment and equilibrium: it is eudaimonic. Excellence becomes a habit and thus induces a constant sense of well-being and contentment in the achievement and acquisition of knowledge. And in striving to the best that they can be and developing themselves the individual and the group transforms its conditions of life, thus society develops through this progress as does the human condition and moves to a new plane of existence. This concept of excellence is fully explicated and argued for in chapter three next, where the debates on Aristotle's work which lead to different interpretations and conclusions on the meaning and context he meant to give this ideal are presented. That section presents excellence in the context of a discussion of Aristotle's *Ethics*<sup>58</sup> and *Politics* which it is argued it is necessary to do (McCarthy: 1978; Ackrill; 1980; Adkins: 1984; Kraut: 2002) to fully comprehend the meaning of eudaimonia. Aristotle framed his philosophy of the good life in the conceptual understanding that the polis is an association of like people for the sake of the best of life – or the seeking of a good

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<sup>58</sup> See: *The Nicomachean Ethics* and the *The Eudemian Ethics*

life as an active citizen or *zoon politikon*: a political and (or) social animal. However, it is also argued that Aristotle did not intend to set out any particular ends for excellence and that eudaimonia could be achieved by an individual in philosophical contemplation (Ackrill: 1992; Heinaman: 1988; 35; Tessitore: 1996: 2) and moreover, that Aristotle intended a hierarchical ordering of ends (Roche: 1995; Kraut; 1991) and so there is an extensive review of the literature in that chapter which concludes with the argument presented by Adkins (1984) that excellence defined as eudaimonia means living a happy and fulfilled life in the present which is facilitated through a relationship between the individual and state and one which lays the foundations for a good life in the future. The thesis proceeds from a critical theoretical perspective based on the work of Habermas, specifically his theory of human interests (1968) communicative action, the concepts of the lifeworld (1984; 1987) and the ideal speech situation (Habermas: 1973).

The thesis is set in the contemporary context of the reforms made to English higher education by the Conservative-Liberal-Democrat Coalition which came to power in 2010 at the height of the Great Recession which was discussed in the introductory chapter and which Callender and Scott (2013) argue is the correct context in which to analyse the reforms . The thesis argues through Dorling (2014a; 2014b) and Clark and Heath (2014) that the recession is global rather than domestic in origin and has deleterious effects on society, and through Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) and Morley (2012) that the Coalition has used the global recession as a pretext to implement ideological reforms to the public sector. Moreover, through Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) it argues that this is a time of uncertainty for society and thus the English university, but one which provides opportunity for arguments for those in academia who are in search of the good-life in general and those who are concerned with human flourishing. The thesis argues that this period represents a crisis for neoliberalism (Habermas: 2008; Fairclough: 2013) an ideology which is defined through Finlayson (2003) and Davies (2014) in the introduction and Davies and Gane (2012) in the theory and methods chapter next. Therefore, the thesis argues that it is this ideology which is in critical condition, not English higher education.

## **Theory and Methods**

Thus chapter three on theory and methods begins by reiterating the utopian perspective from which this thesis proceeds and which is concerned about human flourishing. It then explicates the Hellenic ideal of excellence. The opening section of the chapter concludes by arguing through Finlayson (2007) that the ideal speech situation is the communicative space in which the university can best represent emancipatory excellence, through a discursive event, as its primary legitimating principle. This is a subsidiary argument of the thesis. The chapter then goes on to discuss the Frankfurt School and the way in which Habermas continued the emancipatory project of the institute of social research (Jay: 1996) and whose earlier members, Adorno, Horkheimer and particularly Marcuse (1955; 1964) also inspired this thesis through their writing which expressed the desire for individual freedom and happiness. The chapter explicates Habermas's theory of human interests and communicative action in order to frame the central themes, concepts and arguments of the thesis. That is, firstly, to support the argument that there is a lifeworld in the university and that this is still an independent realm of existence in higher education where excellence is practised, despite the strategic and (or) instrumental interests of the state which intrude on its lifeworld. Secondly, that the interests of the university, particularly the social sciences, reflect those of society and are emancipatory in nature (Delanty: 2005; 84-7) and that these can be agreed through communication, that is through an ideal speech situation. The literature on Habermas and his work which is to be viewed as one project (White: 1998) is voluminous as one would expect and so the literature pertaining to it is represented in sometimes extensive footnotes as well as in the main text of the thesis. His project includes, amongst other things, a reconstruction of historical materialism, the theory of universal pragmatics and communicative rationality, communicative ethics, the ideal speech situation and the legitimation crisis in advanced capitalism. His theories and concepts are central to the arguments of this thesis and are fully explicated in chapter three, however, in order to provide an introduction and overview of the concept of system and lifeworld and the eclectic theoretical origins of Habermas's project, Braaten (1991: 98-9) is useful.

Braaten states that Habermas's hypothesis, the beginning of socio-cultural development, begins with the 'linguistification of the sacred', the replacement of ritual practice with communicative action, and is based on Durkheim's study of the relationship between evolution and group solidarity. Moreover, that to Habermas, Mead and Durkheim illustrate the centrality of developments of communicative practices and their institutionalization in the rationalization of the lifeworld but that a distinction between lifeworld and system must be made if the effects of non-consensual, functional organisation of society are to be understood. Schutz's phenomenological analysis of the lifeworld is employed as a starting point in making this distinction. Habermas is drawn to Schutz's work because of its thorough phenomenological analysis of the lifeworld as a learned 'context of relevance' or background of variously significant elements and events in which agents locate themselves. However, Braaten goes on to say that, 'Schutz is caught within the 'subject-object' framework of the philosophy of consciousness, incapable of making sense of how one of the most basic features of the lifeworld, its intersubjectivity, is possible'. For Habermas, Parsons furnishes the concept of a functionally defined system. However, the functional explanation of systems theory is incapable of explaining the consensual processes within in which individuals identify and interpret their needs and interests and identify their normative explanations, hence the need for any theory that explains the evolution of modern society to employ the dual method of two interacting but separate spheres of society: system and lifeworld (Braaten: 1991: 98-9). In fact, the following chapter discusses Habermas's reconstruction of historical materialism and his evolutionary theory of the development of a communicative competency and the way that the interpretive framework of the lifeworld operates with reference to the 'system', indeed it does this through the work of Habermas and other supporting sources.

The chapter also goes on to discuss *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (1996) one of Habermas's later works and takes issue with Deborah Cook's (2003) position on this and her arguments on his earlier work and what she argues are the contradictions of the lifeworld, its negation by the colonization

of strategic and instrumental objectives and the way that the concept of the ideal speech situation in this context is used, contrary she argues, to the way that Habermas intended. Cooks argues that Habermas intended the ideal speech situation as a critical standard only. Cook's piece essentially represents a polemic between herself and Finlayson (2003), the former defending Adorno, the latter Habermas. The chapter argues with Finlayson (2003) and Benhabib (1985), amongst others, that Habermas's concepts and theories are still compatible and appropriate for operationalization in this stage of capitalism and applicable to a thesis on higher education, despite the shifting of position by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*, in which Cook<sup>59</sup> argues he makes an acceptance of liberal democracy. The chapter fully explicates the concepts of lifeworld and system and argues that an independent lifeworld exists in contemporary English higher education. The chapter also discusses how *Legitimation Crisis* (1973) which provides Habermas's first articulation of the ideal speech situation has resonance with regard to the current state of the domestic and to an extent, European political system, in that the traditional political parties are under threat<sup>60</sup> because of yet another economic crisis in which the measures that the state has traditionally taken to mitigate the effects of the economic system have failed, leading to a loss of faith amongst the public. Perhaps amongst the most valuable of the works covering Habermas and one which is used in chapter three is *Communicative Action: Essays on Jurgen Habermas's The Theory of Communication* which is edited by Honneth and Joas (1991). As the title suggests, the book contains a reply from Habermas which although difficult to always interpret accurately, clarifies his position on various aspects of TCA. The writing of White (1995; 1998) however, provides a clearer interpretation of Habermas and explains his often complex theories and concepts, and so his writing is used in the chapter as a supporting text in footnotes through the sections on Habermas, as indeed are other writers. However, the essays in Honneth and Joas and White's work taken together and along with many other works provide the evidence in chapter three to support the theoretical and methodological

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<sup>59</sup> In fact and as the theory and methods chapter makes clear through Strydom (2011), the concept of immanent transcendence came to the fore for Habermas in the title of *Between Facts and Norms*.

<sup>60</sup> The thesis was written before the general election of 2015 had taken place.



arguments of the thesis. It must be noted however, that Cook's (2013) work was invaluable in driving this further research, as in many ways her paper represents not only a philosophical dismissal of Habermas's theories and concepts, but also, introduces a redundancy to them, in terms of their applicability and appropriateness in a doctoral research project. Cook's work drove the discovery of research material and literature required to argue that the theories and concepts of Habermas are in fact appropriate to use.

The theoretical and methodological perspective of contemporary Critical Theory is set out after the discussions on Habermas and the way that his theories and concepts are interpreted and positioned in the thesis. This section utilizes Strydom (2011) and Delanty (2011) and begins by reiterating the contemporary geo-political dynamic, that is the global economic recession and how this provides the context for an abductive thesis in the sense that it imagines a new and transformed world constructed out of crisis and troubled times (Wright-Mills: 1959). The section explicates the transcendent, explanatory and reconstructive methodology which is encompassed in the concept of immanent transcendence and how the production of knowledge from this perspective is critical and intended for social change. Immanent transcendence is the methodological concept which presupposes the dialectical progression from the real to the imagined or utopian communication community in which emancipatory values and 'what ought to be' is debated in a communicative action (see Strydom: 2011; 67). The chapter goes on to discuss the research of Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al.* (1999: 2000) whose research in an Australian university operated with the concepts of 'lifeworld' and 'system' and the notion of strategic and instrumental objectives. The research of Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al.* makes a conceptual separation between the administration of the university and the academic body, that is, between its lifeworld and leadership and so this literature was not only useful in demonstrating that this thesis does not make this separation but also in demonstrating that a Habermasian perspective is relevant not only in contemporary research but specifically in higher education. Cecez-Kecmanovic's research project is discussed in-depth in chapter three. The remainder of the chapter discusses critical discourse analysis utilizing

Fairclough's (2013) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* reader which again sets out the contemporary ideological environment as one open to critique and explicates the theoretical and methodological process of critical discourse analysis. This is explored in detail in chapter three through the various critical discourse analysts in this book and the specific arguments of the thesis on the 'political discourse of excellence', 'the global race' and 'the knowledge society'. The approach taken by the thesis in its political discourse analysis, which is particularly relevant to chapter five, is also supported through Fairclough's *New Labour New Language* (2002). The chapter ends by exploring neo-liberalism through Davies (2014) in order to illustrate the definition that is operationalized in the thesis, and, to make a philosophical distinction between it and the arguments in this thesis, which in contrast to neo-liberalism connect and affirm a collective and transformative relationship between the individual, higher education and the state.

### **The history of the English university**

Indeed, in chapter four the thesis begins by setting out its argument that excellence has always been a legitimating principle of English higher education and that the relationship between the state and the university can be viewed equally in the liberal, utilitarian and emancipatory philosophies of higher education. The Idea of the university as an autonomous elite institution committed to a liberal education is presented here. In other words, and simplistically, this is learning for learning's sake. This idea of the university has its origins in Newman's *The Idea of the University* (1996) which was a fusion of the belief in the preservation of classical and Christian knowledge and the Victorian Oxford Idea of the elite (and expansionary) teaching institution promoted by Pattison and Jowett (Halsey and Trow: 1971; 43; Halsey: 1996: 36, 43). That is, the liberal university, thought of as a place where the unity of teaching was sacrosanct and enshrined in the doctrines of autonomy.

*Lernfreiheit* and *Lehrfreiheit*: the freedom of the student to learn and the freedom of the tutor, that is the freedom of the professor to teach and research without coercion in the direction of study. This liberal notion of higher education has also of course developed and evolved over time through the influence of the legitimating Idea of the German

Enlightenment conception of the university and the professoriate system. Newman's liberal vision of the university has some symmetry with the modern German university, that is, the notion of knowledge for its own sake and additionally, the cultivation, formation of the mind (*Bildung*). But it differs in its idea of the role of the state and the inquiry into new knowledge. The origins of the modern research university can be traced back to philosophical approach of Wilhelm Von Humboldt, an approach which he took from Friedrich Schleiermacher and from where the socio-political mission of the modern University is derived. This concept embodied the principle of the freedom to teach, study and do research. Humboldt's belief was that the state only had two tasks with regard to the university: 'to ensure the richness (strength and variety) of intellectual resources through the selection of staff and to guarantee their freedom to carry out their work' (Rüegg: 2011; 11-12). As well as stating that the principle of the university was to show students what knowledge was and how to acquire it, Rüegg quotes Schleiermacher as stating that the subject of study was thus for Schleiermacher 'learning how to learn and that the university should teach so that 'the idea of pursuing knowledge, the highest consciousness of reason, is awakened as a guiding principle in the human being' (2011; 11-12). Barnett (1990: 43) in discussing the personal development or 'maturity' of the student, states that the term *Bildung* recalls the Greek sense of knowledge acquisition leading to a higher state of well-being for the individual.

The chapter also argues, through for example, Vernon (2004), that the state was connected to and concerned about higher education from at least the Royal Commissions of the mid-1800s. The chapter argues that through the late 1800s and early 1900s, a drive for equality and democratic participation in higher education and society was under way and that this can be seen through the extension schemes promoted by men like Benjamin Jowett, T.H. Green and R.H. Tawney, moreover, that a general belief in higher education as being important in itself as well as for the country can be seen in the words of Matthew Arnold, T.H Huxley and others. However, through the literature of Schwarz (2004) and Anderson

(1992) the thesis argues that there was also a drive for higher education by the new emerging middle-classes and that this was inextricably linked to the professions and the credentialization of society which was taking place at that time. This aspect of society is juxtaposed with another movement in Victorian England at that time, in that the chapter argues through Powell and Dayson (2013) that the rise of the civic universities was an expression of the Enlightenment values of knowledge and progress. This is also argued through Truscott (1944) and Shils (in Halsey 1996), that is, that there was an expression of the desire for a better future in the creation of the provincial universities, and therefore, that business was not the sole driving force behind their establishment. The chapter argues that this was an expression of excellence. Therefore, the chapter argues that the expressions of excellence in society in the late 1800s and early 1900s, that is, a desire for a better world and for the extension of higher education were mirrored in the university but that the university drove these ideas also. There was symmetry between society and higher education at that time.

The chapter contextualizes the creation of a system of higher education in the changing social and political landscape of late Victoriana, the 1870 Education Act, the Liberal social reforms (1906-14) of the early twentieth century through to the creation of a welfare state in 1945 following the Beveridge Report of 1942. In this context, the chapter discusses in-depth the view of the then Labour Government on higher education and the role they thought it should play in a modern society. The chapter concludes with an in-depth piece on the creation of the Robbins universities and the way that social democratic leaning members of the academy, the civil service and the Labour Party, for example, R.H. Tawney and A.D. Lindsay drove this. This was particularly the case with the establishment of Keele as the chapter explains through Michael Beloff (1970). Beloff's *The Plateglass Universities* is referred to at the conclusion of this chapter when the creation of the University of Sussex is discussed. The chapter argues that although there were contradictions in the establishment of this new university, which is set out in David Daiches (1964) fascinating *The Idea of a*

*New University: An Experiment in Sussex*, that the ‘new maps of learning’ were an attempt to engage with society through new thinking about the academy and its relationship with the wider world.

### **Robbins, Dearing and Browne**

Chapter five conducts a critical discourse analysis of the Robbins Report (1963), the Dearing Report (1997) (NICHE) and the Browne Report (2010) and the subsequent White Paper (BIS: 2011). The chapter argues that excellence can be discerned throughout all these reports but equally, that an increasing instrumentalism can be seen in each as state policy focuses more intently on higher education as the years progress. The discourse of the global race and knowledge society become louder in each until the Browne Report and White Paper make explicit the primary purpose and connection of the university to the economic imperative, on an individual and societal level. The chapter argues with others, for example Callender (2013) that the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011) attempted not only to invert the notion of higher education from a public to a private good but also attempted to invert the pedagogic relationship (Collini: 2012; 178-9) by introducing a competitive economic market in higher education, in which the student constructed as a consumer is at the centre as the arbiter of educational quality, implying perhaps, the possession by them of a greater knowledge of the purpose and the dynamics of higher education than those in the academy. This notion is critiqued extensively in the last section of chapter five through Barnett (1990; 2013) and research interview material from academics who were participants in the research stage of the thesis. The research participants quoted there include a Reader of sociology and the head of a School of the Built Environment as well as a vice-chancellor who was a member of the Browne Review. The chapter attempts to argue through this research material that the pedagogic dynamic is somewhat different to the way it is envisaged in the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011) and that self-realisation is a process which involves the interaction of student and teacher in a dialogical relationship in which the student practices independence in the pursuit of knowledge and the

development of new attributes and dispositions (Barnett: 1990). However, the chapter begins with the Robbins Report (1963) and at this point the background and personalities of this seminal report are represented, particularly that of Robbins, and a brief history of the man appears in the endnotes to the thesis. The purpose of this is to show the prevailing philosophies of the time. Lionel Robbins is considered by many to have been a liberal (Carswell: 1985; Howson: 2011) whose career as an economist was influenced at one end of the philosophical spectrum by Hayek and the other by Keynes whose economic policy he deeply disagreed with despite being heavily involved himself in the talks at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. He was also great friends with Beveridge whom he formed the Academic Freedom Committee (AFC) with after travelling to Germany before the Second World War and witnessing the persecution of the Jews, a number of whom he helped to rescue through the AFC. This gave him a life-long hatred of Anti-Semitism. It can be said that Robbins was not only a liberal humanist but a man of the university having started his career at UCL and indeed, he was ensconced in the LSE when called upon to chair the committee of inquiry into higher education. The Robbins Report carried his stamp (Moser: 1988; 5) and the stamp of academia (Barnett: 1998) although it was also heavily influenced by Claus Moser and Sir Phillip Morris (Carswell: 1985: 32).

The critical discourse analysis of the Robbins Report is greatly helped in this chapter by Carswell's (1985) *Government and Universities in Britain: programme and performance 1960-1980*. As well as being a historian of some note, John Carswell served as Treasury Assessor during the Robbins inquiry and was the Secretary of the UGC from 1974 to 1977. The literature surrounding Robbins and the Report itself is covered extensively in that chapter and in the footnotes. The critique concludes by arguing that, 'the Robbins Report provided a philosophical blueprint for the future of higher education, in that it set out the principle that higher education is a cultural as well as a public and individual good and that access to it should be open to all those that can attain it, regardless of the ends to which it is put' (author: see page 191). The specific recommendations of the Report and its successes and failures and omissions are discussed in depth in the chapter. Perhaps the most significant

omission from the Robbins Report in terms of the contemporary situation, was the issue of university fees, that is, how higher education was to be financed in the years ahead, which is argued (Shattock 2013:22) to have stored up trouble for future years. Indeed, this is the issue that the Dearing Report (NICHE) is largely remembered for and as the thesis explains, this is why the Dearing Report was passed from the outgoing Conservative administration to the incoming New Labour government of 1997. An exchange that would be reciprocated in 2010 when the Conservative Liberal-Democrat Coalition government inherited the Browne Review from the outgoing administration of Gordon Brown, although as the thesis argues in its introduction, policy on higher education was bi-partisan then and had been for some time with regard to its financing and direction. And perhaps unfairly, it is the directing of the university to the labour market and the needs of the economy and the private interest of the individual which the Dearing Report is also most remembered for after the recommendation that students should pay fees. This is because despite focusing on skills, the Dearing Report also in fact focused on widening participation and moreover, conceptualised the university as an institution firmly integrated in a 'learning society' and committed to the development of the individual and this is discussed in-depth in the sections covering the Dearing Report which also includes a discussion on how its recommendations were carried through. Of course, the implication of the term 'learning society' connotes both a positive and negative conception of the university, in that a learning society implies an on-going development of the collective and individual but can also imply a framing of the university as an institution locked into the existing understanding of economic society and so one which affirms the status quo. However, the thesis argues that the Report does genuinely recognise the transformative potential of higher education. This is despite the paradoxical presentation of the university as an independent community of scholars in pursuit of a virtue at its outset through a quote from Masfield (Masfield, 1946 in NCIHE, 1997, introduction, 9-10) and the subsequent notion of the integrated institution of the learning society geared to the exigencies of the global race. Trow (1988) however critiques the Dearing Report on other grounds, that is, for its lack of understanding of higher education and specifically Dearing

himself, because he was not an academic and so lacking in knowledge on the university and moreover, the Report's failure to make realistic financial projections for its future. Similarly, although making a much wider point, Barnett (1988) in *The Coming of the Global Village: A tale of two inquiries* juxtaposes The Robbins Report with the Dearing Report by characterising the former as a report of the 'internal voices' of the 'rural village' of academia, whilst describing the latter as reflecting the 'external voices' of the 'newly emerging global village', suggesting that higher education was now explicitly the concern of wider economic society and thought of in far more instrumental terms than in the past. In contrast to Trow (1988), Scott (2013) praises the Dearing Report for the expansive nature of its inquiry and consultations and, as a document still valuable to those researching higher education today. Indeed, the thesis refers to Watson and Amoah's (Eds.: 2007) *The Dearing Report Ten Years on* which describes *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (the title of the Dearing Report) as being 'widely recognised as a major landmark in the modern history of UK higher education. It stands ready comparison with impact of the Robbins Report a third of a century ago' (Watson and Amoah: 2007; 1).

The Browne Review (2013) made considerable consultations in its review stage (Scott: 2013) but is criticised for the paucity of its final report. *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance* is critiqued in chapter five directly by the thesis, and as stated above, this critical discourse analysis covers both the Browne Review and the subsequent government White Paper of 2011 on higher education: *Students at the Heart of the System*. At this juncture, the thesis uses research material to critique the central thrust of the two reports. That is that a market is the best way of ordering English higher education and the positioning of students at the centre of this dynamic is the best way to do this. Thus the research material is employed<sup>61</sup> in such a way that it critiques the fundamental premises of

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<sup>61</sup> The thesis was greatly helped in its deployment of research interview material by Amoah, M. (2007), '100 Voices': the state of the HE nation. In: Watson, D. and Amoah, M. (Eds.) *The Dearing Report ten years on*. London: Institute of Education. pp. 109-134, Simbuerger, Elisabeth (2008) *Against and beyond - for sociology: a study on the self-understanding of sociologists in England*. PhD



the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011), the formulation of policy in the first instance, and the consequences of the radical interventions for excellence, for example, participation in English higher education and thus, the consequences for democratic society in the second. The research material is taken from interviews with vice-chancellor's, including a member of the Browne Review, a registrar, the head of a big school at a Robbins university, an emeritus professor of higher education, a dean of an arts and humanities faculty, the head of a school of the built environment, a professor of sociology, a reader in sociology and a vice-chancellor and widening participation leader.

The chapter also argues that the reforms of the Coalition are in danger of harming widening participation in English higher education, in contradiction to the stated aims of the White Paper (BIS: 2011), through the creation of a market which has allowed the bigger and older universities to expand whilst newer institutions are in some cases forced to compete, either raising entry requirements or concentrating on more vocational subjects. The role of post-92s in widening participation is specifically addressed through the responses of a vice-chancellor and leading representative of Universities UK.

The chapter ends with extracts from a Reader in sociology who articulates her concerns about the REF but who also suggests that aspects of instrumentalism in society sit more comfortably now with the university. The thesis ends in chapter six by using research material from a vice-chancellor and leading representative of Universities UK and concludes with material from a former vice-chancellor and a now professor of higher education that is used by the thesis in an attempt to argue that the university is intimately connected to the interests of society, especially the communities in which they exist.

### **The conclusion of the thesis**

This forms the basis for the final subsidiary argument of this thesis in chapter six, which is that the ideal speech situation exists not only through the scientific-public validation of social science, in particular the critical normative work of Critical Theory

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thesis, University of Warwick. See: <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/2026/> and Lucas, Lisa (2001) *The research 'game': a sociological study of academic research work in two universities*. PhD thesis, University of Warwick. <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/36398/>

(Strydom: 2011; 158-165), but through the discussion of the ideal of emancipatory excellence in a public communicative act with knowledgeable social agents (Bohman: 1999; 475). However, the chapter starts by presenting extensive quotes from research participants, which question the very notion of research assessment and its limitations in informing us about research excellence in English higher education. This section is supported by Sayer's (2014) *Rank Hypocrisies: An Insult to the REF* which criticises the REF as a meaningless exercise in the competitive ranking of the elite institutions which is where this thesis began in its introductory chapter when it represented the view of a participant who said that in principle that this is all excellence could come to mean in the future. The material will also speak for itself but is also critiqued by the thesis as it attempts to highlight the contradictions in the participant's arguments. This material is juxtaposed with research interview material which takes a different view on the old RAE and present REF, arguing that research assessment has been beneficial to the university, in particular newer universities. The chapter also presents research material from a vice-chancellor who on one hand critiques the ranking exercises as being divisive and unrepresentative and on the other as a valuable tool for the realignment of his institution in the competitive arena of the English higher education sector, partly by the censure of underperforming academic staff. At this juncture, what it means to be an academic in the lifeworld of the university is discussed through the responses of a professor of sociology who refers to Adorno's *Free Time*<sup>62</sup> (1991) and the head of a big school who also referred to the vocational nature of the academic life, which constantly seeks excellence in its activity and achievement, responses which in part, perhaps, suggest an answer to the research interview question, how does the political discourse of excellence in higher education affect the lifeworld of the university?: the answer which can be deduced

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<sup>62</sup> See *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* by Theodor Adorno and his essay *Free Time* in which he critiques the sharp delineation of work time and free time constructed by the mass media and consumer industry in advanced capitalism and in which he states that: listening to music, reading with all my attention, these activities are part and parcel of my life; to call them hobbies would make a mockery of them. On the other hand I have been fortunate enough that my job, the production of philosophical and sociological works and university teaching, cannot be defined in terms of that strict opposition to free time, which is demanded by the current razor sharp division of the two' (Adorno: 1991; 189).

from these responses is of course that it does not. The thesis now seeks to argue precisely that. That is, that it does not radically change it, as well as arguing for its fundamental premise, that a fundamental legitimating principle of the English university is the individual and collective transformative ideal which promotes human flourishing and so happiness.

### **Chapter three: theory and method**

Thus first this chapter explores and explicates the concept that is at the centre of this thesis. That is excellence. In critically analysing the interpretation of the Hellenic ideal made for this research project, the relationship that is made in the thesis between excellence and higher education is also presented and critically reflected upon. Second, the chapter then goes on to explain the perspective of Habermas from which the theoretical arguments in this thesis are made. Thus his writings on knowledge and human interests and the theory of communicative action are presented and critically analysed as their application in this thesis are made clear. In doing so, the concepts of ‘technical knowledge’, ‘practical knowledge’ and ‘emancipatory knowledge’, ‘lifeworld’, ‘systems’, ‘distorted communication’ and so on are explained. Third, the methodology of critical and political discourse analysis and Critical Theory more generally are presented as is the positioning of the central concept of ‘immanent transcendence’. Moreover, the application of these concepts in the thesis and their relevance to its subsidiary arguments are developed and elucidated through engagement with similar research projects which also operationalize elements of Habermas’s work. In the context of an examination of critical and political discourse analysis, the term ‘discourse’ is also fully explicated as is the operationalization of the concept of ‘the global race’. Excellence is at the heart of this thesis as the introduction to this study made clear and so this chapter begins by representing the Aristotelian origins of this ideal exceptional human achievement.

#### **Eudaimonia: excellence in existence**

Thus the central premise of this thesis is that excellence defined as the Hellenic Ideal, an emancipatory philosophy of life, is one of the legitimating principles of English higher education. This evidence for this thesis was presented in brief or in microcosm in the introductory chapter to illustrate the intellectual and theoretical perspective from which this thesis operates. The substantive evidence for the fundamental premise of this study is examined in earnest in chapter four when the historical origins of the English university are explored and critically analysed along with the dominant discourses – the ideas and values –

of the periods covered. The thesis operates from a critical theoretical perspective which conceptualises higher education and the university as a historical and contemporary emancipatory or liberating institution for the individual and society. In outlining the perspective and logic of critical social science, Fairclough (2010:2) discusses how the latest form of capitalism or ‘neoliberalism’ has introduced many political and social changes, including in education. He states that the tradition of critical social science in which he works ‘is focused on a better understanding of how and why contemporary capitalism prevents or limits, as well as in certain respects facilitates, human well-being and flourishing’. Such understanding may, in favourable circumstances, contribute to overcoming or at least mitigating these obstacles and limits’. Thus this thesis employs a subsidiary argument that English higher education through a new understanding of excellence in the contemporary political sphere has a transformative potential for the human condition. This is despite the constraints of competitive economic society which are argued to have been intensified by the effects of the Great Recession<sup>63</sup> (Clark and Heath: 2014). Firstly though, the historical and philosophical origins of ‘excellence’ are critically examined. At the start of this thesis excellence was defined quite concisely through Aristotle’s concept of ‘eudaimonia’ and so now the complexity of what is an unashamedly idealistic vision of the ends, indeed, the purpose of human existence itself is explored in-depth. Eudaimonia is a central concept in Aristotelian ethics as is Arête which is often translated as ‘virtue’ or, ‘excellence’. Aristotle set out this complex and at times contradictory theory of what is essentially the character of the person, the quality of their life and arguably, that of the wider community in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (2009) and *The Eudemian Ethics* (Nagel: 1972: 252) Eudaimonia is often argued to refer to the desired end,

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<sup>63</sup> The Great Recession, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, was precipitated by a new global economic downturn now widely accepted to have been caused by an over reliance on the extension of credit by banks and other large financial institutions and was precipitated by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US in 2007. Clark and Heath (2014) argue that the recession has caused fundamental changes to the fabric of UK society and will continue to have uneven economic consequences even in the years after a recovery: The Great Recession is said to be the deepest economic depression since the 1930s. See report: *Were we really all in it together? The distributional effects of the UK Coalition government's tax-benefit policy changes* by Agostini, Hills and Sutherland (2014) for an analysis of consequences of the Coalition’s economic response to the recession in the UK and the unequal effects of ‘austerity’.

purpose, goal or telos of human life. Thus simplistically, eudaimonia can be defined as happiness, well-being or flourishing (Kristjánsson: 2007: 15). It can perhaps be better described as a feeling of completeness and centring of character (*hexis*) which is strived for through the virtue of goodness. (Ackrill: 1980: 15). Aristotle uses his famous *ergon* argument (Roche: 1988) to set out the position of virtue from which ‘man’ acts, and although and as Achtenberg (1989) points out, the meaning of *ergon* is contested and its importance to a reading of *The Nicomachean Ethics* questioned, it is as she argues, perhaps central to an over-all understanding of this work, thus this thesis also argues, to eudaimonia and excellence. *Ergon* can be said to mean the very character of a person (unique to human beings, thus different from the functioning of animals) which is developed through reason and thus moral and ethical behaviour and thought, and as such, it can be defined as the very ‘function’ of an ethical agent. There are additional interpretations as Achtenberg (1989: 37) demonstrates, firstly quoting Clark (1971; 1975) , who defines *ergon* as ‘characteristic activity’ then secondly, Nagel (1972), who states ‘that which we do that makes us what we are’<sup>64</sup> (e.g., excellence is what we are, what we do – a state of being) then thirdly and, crucially, Achtenberg (1989: 37) shows through a quote from Nussbaum (1978: 106) that a deeper meaning can be attributed to the *ergon* argument : ‘Aristotle commends to his reflective audience a life that ... involves the exercise of all our *human* capacities and is truly a human life rather than one that could be led by a plant or a cow’, which implies that *ergon* not only refers to the uniqueness of human talents but it is the application of these to some higher purpose which is important. Indeed, Achtenberg (1989: 37) argues at the conclusion of her paper that *ergon* is rational action (internal to the person) and that by itself it is incomplete. Roche (1988: 178) points to Aristotle’s arguably, ambiguous and

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<sup>64</sup> The notion of *ergon* is contested with regard to whether it refers to the proper activity or to the end product of the person, questioned as to whether it is specific to that persons abilities, character traits etc., or of the collective, deemed to be a relative characteristic to an end e.g. a skill or product and vice-versa, and as such, is inextricably related to the contested nature of *eudaimonia* and to arguments which question whether this is an inclusive, comprehensive or intellectualist Aristotelean concept. (Roche: 1988:). That is, for example, whether eudaimonia refers to individual and or collective happiness as an end or respectively to an active life in the present moment. These arguments are represented throughout the following section of writing.

ubiquitous use of *ergon* as the good in ‘the man’ (as well as in all things) and the relationship of this to *praxis*, that is action based on good intent which then produces a further good. Thus, rational action comes from the possession of virtue, it is informed by it and so the two interact with each other but, virtue must come first (Achtenberg: 1989: 37). Indeed, how we achieve happiness, according to Aristotle, is through the living of a virtuous life, that is to say, we must be morally good. Kristjánsson (*ibid*) argues that eudaimonia depends on the realization of the moral virtues and is the completion of these for the human good – this is the *ergon* argument. It is a rational activity of the soul in accordance with virtue in a complete life; this is *energia*, the positive power of action that makes for the good life. Ackrill (1980: 19) for example argues that Aristotle was not simply talking about achieving happiness as an end that we strive to reach as the culmination of our existence, but rather that life should be happy and enjoyable throughout. At the outset of this thesis an independent definition of excellence based on this Hellenic ideal was presented. In that definition of a liberating interpretation of excellence a research participant was quoted as saying that it has been axiomatic since Aristotle that education is eudaimonic (professor of English and Cultural studies at Russell Group university). That is to say, education fulfils the souls of men and women; having knowledge of oneself and the world around us induces and then promotes a belief in the good life and in turn, a good society<sup>65</sup>. In other words, higher education does not simply promote a good future but a good and happy present. Thus the participation in and the way we go about higher education fulfils this basic precept of a virtuous life. That is, in striving to be the best we can be, we overcome setback and failure

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<sup>65</sup> The professor of English and Cultural studies also said that: In principal obviously it is a good idea that more people are better educated. At one level I take that as kind of an axiomatic principle, that the more education we can have the better. It’s the old Aristotlean idea that knowledge is eudaimonic, it cheers you up, you feel better if you know things than if you don’t know things, so it serves at least that function, so at one level that’s an axiomatic good that we get more and more people engaged with what we do at university. However, ... in the current climate the way that is mediated is that more students are buying an education and I have nothing to sell ... I’ve got something to say, but I’ve got nothing to sell, absolutely nothing to sell at all and I’ve got something to say because the business of the knowledge industry if you want to call the university that, is the on-going and never ending search for the limits of one’s knowledge -we usually call that research. And paradoxically that means we are actually searching not for knowledge but for what is unknown ... So the first thing to say is I’m not in favour of a mass system which thinks of the masses as consumers, I am in favour of a mass system which thinks of its masses as citizens, that’s a different thing entirely ... (professor of English and Cultural Studies at Russell Group university).

and in doing so we develop as we learn through experience to act in the correct or ‘medial’ way.<sup>66 67</sup> In the context of higher education this can be described as the development of a ‘reflective [and, or emotional] intelligence’ (<sup>68</sup>Braham: 2013). Eudaimonia is then, as Kristjánsson argues, a radically moralized notion. Indeed, in order to achieve a state of what admittedly sounds like near human perfection, Aristotle states that we must employ the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* (the virtue of thought). This serves the moral virtues. Phronesis can be defined as ‘a state grasping the truth, involving reason concerning action about what is good or bad for a human being’ (Aristotle quoted in Kristjánsson: 2007; 17). Nagel (1995: 113-114) in discussing *The Nicomachean Ethics* and what he describes as the indecisive intellectual and comprehensive accounts given by Aristotle in this work, states that ‘eudaimonia essentially involves not just the activity of the theoretical intellect, but the full range of human life and action, in accordance with the broader excellences of moral virtue and practical wisdom’. Hagel (*ibid*) goes on to say that ‘this view connects eudaimonia with the conception of human nature as composite, i.e. as involving the interaction of reason, emotion, perception and, action in an ensouled body’.

It can be argued then that eudaimonia is a harmonious state of being, a higher state of consciousness, which is achieved through intellectual and practical labour. It is in this sense that excellence is applied in this thesis to higher education. Adkins (1984: 29), in a discussion in which he argues that Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics* were intended to be read together, quotes Aristotle as saying in the *Ethics* that ‘the eudaimonia of the individual is the same as the eudaimonia of the polis (the state or political community); that the polis is an

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Medial’ or the mean refers to the centre path of emotions and character traits which Aristotle argued it was necessary to walk to achieve individual ‘excellence’ (Duvall and Dotson: 1988: 25).

<sup>67</sup> See Barnett (2013: 80-1) who provides us with a contemporary conceptualization of character formation in higher education. i.e. the dispositions and qualities that students develop through a genuine higher education.

<sup>68</sup> Matthew Braham, professor of political philosophy at the University of Bayreuth in Germany was quoted in the *Times Higher Education* (2013) as saying that higher education is about the systematic development of a reflective intelligence and not simply technical and occupational training. Similarly, Barnett (1990: 119) argues that the development of the highest form of rationality and learning is emancipatory for the student. To quote: ‘Rationality at the level of enlightenment should lead on, then, to self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-criticism. In turn this continuing dialogue with oneself provides the basis for self-transcendence, for the development of the self, such that entirely new possibilities of thought and action are opened up’; critical thinking and reasoning are not simply intellectual tools for their own sake or for application to the economic sphere then.



association of like people for the sake of the best of life'<sup>69</sup>. He goes on to quote Aristotle, stating 'that human beings have the same goal individually and in common, so that the definition of the best man and the best constitution must be the same'. Thus Adkin's thesis and interpretation of Aristotle would suggest that excellence achieved through eudaimonia is a collective project of shared values and desired outcomes deriving from the best of individuals and the best of the state resulting in synthesis or dialectical progression towards something better than the present. Indeed, McCarthy (1978: 2) states that 'for Aristotle politics was continuous with ethics, the doctrine of the good and just life'. However, it is also true that Aristotle stated in the conclusion to the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the contemplative life is the best expression of eudaimonia. That is to say, that complete or perfect happiness is to be found in the philosophical activity of contemplation, the practice of ethical virtue is a happy second degree (Ackrill: 1992; Heinaman: 1988; 35; Tessitore: 1996: 2). Yu (2001: 115) describes these two different notions of eudaimonia in the *Ethics* as 'inclusive' and 'intellectualist'. The first notion, the inclusive describes 'a complex of virtues and external goods' the second, the intellectualist notion 'is concerned exclusively with the contemplative virtue of wisdom' (*sophia*). In questioning the comprehensive account of eudaimonia, Heinaman (1988:11) suggests that some of us are better at contemplation than others but this does not preclude a happy and good life as individuals may have increased levels of moral action. In this case in order to achieve eudaimonia we must be possessed of the faculty of practical wisdom which we may also not possess equally. This is despite this faculty, according to Heinaman, being simply 'a virtue of the lower part of the rational soul which deals with variable objects unlike the higher part of the rational soul which deals with invariable objects' (this distinction refers to the difference between the concrete and the abstract). The point made here by Heinaman is that Aristotle's writing suggests that we are not all able to attain the same level of happiness – and therefore excellence - whether it is through contemplation or moral and practical action and that some

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<sup>69</sup> Kraut (2002:4) states that 'Aristotle conceives of the *Ethics* and *Politics* as following a logical progression. The former establishing the foundation of politics, the latter providing the detail that allows his study of human well-being to be put into practice'.

individuals are constrained by circumstance (physical as well as intellectual) which will determine their level of eudaimonia<sup>70</sup>. First, with regard to the theory that Aristotle was stating that real happiness can only be found through contemplation: when applied to higher education, this intellectualist notion would suggest an institution removed from society and concerned primarily with the life of the mind and indeed, an elitist one at that. Second, the idea that happiness cannot be found equally in individuals because of unequal talents presupposes differentiated educational outcomes and a differentiated society. This view of the inequality of the human condition might on first thought seem to offend against the idea that we can all strive for excellence together and achieve a sense of well-being, but on reflection, and despite the very unequal society upon which Aristotle drew, it perhaps paints a realistic picture of human society in that we are all possessed of different skills and achieve happiness in different spheres of life – practical or intellectual or both. Moreover, these unequal talents surely do not preclude Adkin's (1984: 29) interpretation of Aristotle, that is, 'an association of like people', in that 'human beings have the same goal individually and in common' which presupposes that whatever our differences in ability, personality, body or character we all strive for the same thing and that is happiness - 'harmony'. In this vein, and in arguing for the comparability of intellectual ability in theorizing and moral action, Shea (1988: 753) argues against the intellectualist position represented most notably by J. L. Ackrill and David Keyt. Shea takes issue with the interpretation of the *Ethics* put forward by Ackrill and Keyt that theorizing - considered divine by Aristotle - and moral action - considered merely human by Aristotle - are incommensurable (in the *Ethics* Aristotle subordinates moral action to theorizing). Shea specifically takes issue with the notion that theorizing or the contemplative life is superior to practical wisdom and the moral virtues

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<sup>70</sup> Chuska (2000: 11-12) in discussing Aristotle's *Politics* refers to the assertion made by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* that agreement for the best life already exists and this consists of three things: external goods, those of the body and those of the soul. These include being 'blessed' by bodily goods such as, size, strength, athletic body, good old age, health and beauty while external goods refer to children, honour, friends and good luck. The soul consists of attributes akin to the character traits that hexis presupposes: courage, self-control, justice or prudence. These blessings as Aristotle describes them are of course contrary to an egalitarian view of excellence being as they are, ascribed; a hierarchy of nature as Aristotle described it; in *Politics* he argued that some humans are naturally inferior to others and deserve to be enslaved.

given the potential and obviously good practical outcomes of moral action. Similarly, Roche (1995) critiques and so disputes the intellectualist and at the same time comprehensive position of Richard Kraut (1991), which asserts that Aristotle did indeed claim theorizing to produce the greatest happiness but that practical activity was a route to a secondary happiness and thus both represent excellent rational activity and although separate, distinct from each other, are still comparable. A position as Roche points out, which also constructs a hierarchical ordering of intellectual activity over practical action to a hierarchical notion – interpretation - of how Aristotle thought about means and ends, that is to say, with regard to what order our actions flow to achieve the greatest good and, which are the most important to achieve this, and moreover, that the aggregate of all human goods can be organised in this way achieve a final end, the perfect human good, rather than happiness in the present moment<sup>71</sup>. Thus, the questions that flow from this position are this: is the mechanism by which we achieve our ends the most important or is it the end result which produces the most eudaimonia – happiness and contentment in achievement – success. Which is dominant and which subordinate? To put this in a more concrete way, by way of questions which are directly relevant to this thesis, would making higher education accessible and valuable to all by equalizing participation in all our institutions be more important than the end result of enabling individuals to excel and in the process transform their own and our world? And which would achieve the highest level of eudaimonia? It is possible to argue that yes, of course the action of making a transformation possible by through what could be described as a moral and or ethical virtue is the important practical action which makes the ultimate transformation of social conditions possible. However, the thought, the theory behind the end purpose, and the goal itself could be argued, if we were to take Kraut's position, to be the superior form of eudaimonia – that is if we are to assume that this example made real would induce a feeling of equilibrium – satisfaction - at each stage of its implementation.

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<sup>71</sup> However, Kraut (2002: writing later in Aristotle: Political Philosophy on Aristotle's *Politics* where he reiterates Adkin's view on the necessity of reading the former with the *Ethics* confirms that Aristotle does think that human-well-being consists in excellence activity suggesting that eudaimonia can be experienced in the present.

The central point of Kraut's (1991) thesis on Aristotle is however, that all human goods are organised into a single structure so that each subordinate end can facilitate the ideal – a higher goal of human life. This position would of course suggest that each step along the way to 'utopia' is simply that and thus human activity and goods are not worthwhile in themselves but must conform to a political imaginary: Kraut argues that Aristotle values the ethical virtues, as they subordinate emotion to reason, and in doing so enhance our ability to lead a life devoted to politics and philosophy. However as Roche (*ibid*) argues, Kraut's position may rest on a misinterpretation of eudaimonia in that Aristotle did not specify any ultimate end for human society. Indeed, Kraut (1991:3) points out himself at the beginning of his work when representing Aristotle's opening question in the *Ethics* 'what is the good for a human?' that Aristotle quickly realised that different people have different conceptions of what happiness is. Similarly, Duvall and Dotson (1988) question David Heyt's interpretation of Aristotle's *zoon politikon* which defines man as a political animal who is only able to achieve eudaimonia as a citizen leading an active life within the polis. Duvall and Dotson see the polis as a social community and not simply a political sphere and make a distinction between ethical and political virtue. As Duvall and Dotson point out, Aristotle defined man as a social animal because he possesses the power of speech, is rational and is able to decide what is right and wrong through deliberation. This does not mean that the individual always finds perfect agreement (Finlayson: 2007: 550) but that through exercising their intellect through rational debate within families, households with friends and in communities man becomes a part of or helps form the polis, where given the ideal situation, a democracy, man is able to exercise his intellect and achieve what is according to Kraut (2002) the perfect eudaimonia; a political and philosophical life. Duvall and Dotson argue though that participation in the polis is not necessary for the individual to achieve eudaimonia and that his life as a social animal and independent ethical agent can provide the environment to do this. Quoting Aristotle, Duvall and Dotson underscore this perspective on life in the polis. Duvall and Dotson (1998: 32) quote thus from Aristotle's *Politics*: the purpose of the polis is 'to provide a living' and to provide 'military... protection against

injustice'. They go on to say that it is important to realize, though, that its sole purpose in providing these goods is (again quoting Aristotle) 'to enable its members, in its households and the [ir] kinships to live *well*'. Duvall and Dotson go on to quote Nussbaum<sup>72</sup> who says that the polis does not exist 'to necessitate actual good functioning, but to create the context in which a person *might* live well, in other words, might choose a flourishing [or eudaimon] life'. Indeed, if we read Aristotle's *Politics*<sup>73</sup> through Adkins (1984), we have a way of conceptualising eudaimonia as excellence which does not rely on the greatest achievement being a perfect future or end for human society and indeed, one that does not rest on one virtue dominating the other. Excellence conceived like this - and connecting the household to the state - would be living well, efficiently, in the present, and successfully, in a shared existence through cooperative excellences (this can be read as different virtues, skills - different competencies) combining leisure with an active life for citizens in the polis which creates the foundations for eudaimonia; the good-life. As well as presupposing a political relationship between the individual and the state<sup>74</sup> and at the same time a social existence for the individual, this conception of eudaimonia recognises difference in excellence, its aims and what it consists of, and it is this difference which was apparent in responses from a number of research participants for this study. However, the concept of excellence in higher education as a shared project for achieving an idealized end - a better future world - was also

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<sup>72</sup> M. Nussbaum, 'Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution' in *XI. Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. Pazzig, pp. 145 - 206, p. 147.

<sup>73</sup> Kraut (2002: viii) cautions us to remember that in *Politics* Aristotle shows no inclination to social democracy, barring women from public life, and holds that manual labour is degrading and barring farmers from his ideal city state and claimed that democracy was inherently corrupt. However, Kraut points to the lessons we can learn from Aristotle's ideas about a good society, justice, citizenship, equality, democracy, community, property, family, class conflict and the corrosive effect of poverty and wealth are still worth taking seriously. Aristotle believed that the political community must aim, above all at the good of its members - at the realization of their powers as thinking, feeling and social beings.

<sup>74</sup> In discussing Aristotle's view on the relationship between politics and language Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012; 18-19) quote an extract from his *Politics* taken from Ackrill: But obviously man is a political animal in a sense in which a bee is not, or any other gregarious animal. Nature, as we say, does nothing without some purpose, and she has endowed man alone among animals with the power of speech. Speech is something different from voice, which is possessed by other animals also and used by them to express pain and pleasure .... Speech on the other hand, serves to indicate what is just and what is unjust. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have the perception of what is good and evil, just and unjust, etc. It is the sharing of a common view in *these* matters that makes a household and a state. (1253a 1-18, Ackrill 1987)

articulated during some interviews. In discussing an ‘argumentative turn’ in political theory Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 29) quote Finlayson who argues that:

democracies are premised on the recognition that people disagree not only about means but about ends and even about the meaning of means and ends’ and that the field of politics ‘abounds’ in problems without solutions’, in the sense of problems without one obvious solution that everyone might be brought to agree with. Hence, in the absence of indisputable truths, given fundamental uncertainty and risk, divergent interests and value pluralism, the role of rhetoric is essential in convincing others to see things in the same light as we do, so as to produce agreement around a contested claim Finlayson (2007: 550).

At the start of this thesis an independent definition and interpretation of eudaimonia and thus of excellence was juxtaposed with a quote from Aristotle which was taken from Kristjánsson (2007). In a subsidiary argument to the central premise, that excellence conceptualised like this is a legitimating principle of higher education, the thesis proposes that this philosophical view of the world can provide the basis of a shared good-life which is transformative for society in that it continuously develops the uniquely human skills and talents of its members. As stated in its introduction, the thesis also subsequently argues that the transformative message of excellence is eclipsed by the political discourse of excellence, the economic imperative, indeed research for this thesis tended to confirm this; many participants expressed a belief in the transformative - emancipatory power of higher education, a belief which is not always heard publicly. Hence, and following logically from Finlayson’s argument above, this thesis argues that the ideal speech situation developed by Habermas would provide the space in which those in higher education could argue for the liberating, emancipatory value of excellence against the competition and instrumentalism of the political discourse, whether this be for a better shared existence in the present or the political imaginary of a transformed society of the future; an excellent state of existence – or, of being. This is the theoretical framework in which the thesis is set. Thus the following sections explain in-depth the relevant theories and concepts of Habermas, whilst placing these in a wider, although of course far more limited discussion about his wider work.

### **Habermas: critical theory and a communicative action**

Jurgen Habermas is one of the most influential philosophers and social theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and indeed, he arguably remains so in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His work spans over fifty years and over this time it has developed to encompass an eclectic mix of social theory and philosophy, including the work of Weber, Parsons, Mead, Durkheim, Piaget, Kohlberg, Marx and Schutz, and the theoretical perspectives of structural functionalism, developmental psychology, symbolic interactionism, , linguistic philosophy, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, and ethnomethodology. Habermas is best known as the second generation representative of the Frankfurt School. This is the famous institute for social research where Critical Theory was developed in 1920s Germany and whose most notable original and leading members were Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Due to considerations of space in this thesis it is not possible to go into the very rich and fascinating history of the Frankfurt School here, save to pointing to Martin Jay's definitive work on the school *The Dialectical Imagination* (1996). This work leads the reader from the optimistic days for these Marxist academics in post-First World War One Germany to the darkest times, the rise of fascism and the National Socialists in 1933, to America and then to the Cold War world, dominated on one hand by America and on the other by the Soviet Union. To Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse this world became one of total domination – totalitarianism -and resistant to the critique of the Frankfurt School. What is important to say here, is that Habermas's work developed as a way of working through the project of Critical Theory in order to save or 'reconstruct historical materialism'. Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse's work became increasingly pessimistic post-1945, and so Habermas's project was a way of redressing this and perhaps arguably, to save Critical Theory through a reworking of the original project of the Frankfurt School. It is also interesting, indeed, important to note for later discussions that Habermas was research assistant to Adorno at one time and that this did not stop him from taking on his former mentors work. Thus Critical Theory or academic Marxism developed over time, because of the perceived failure of the revolutionary subject by the first generation of the Frankfurt School, from a critique of political economy to the critique of consciousness and

ideology in the culturally pessimistic and totalizing social theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School. This perspective had come to rely on a philosophy of history and the negative dialectic of Adorno<sup>75</sup>, which is, that every act of intellectual inquiry is an act of negation of the contradictions of social totality performed in an overall critique of modernity (Delanty: 2005: 77). This critique faltered on the premise of a closed system of domination - resistant to critique. Following this, Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School moved via Habermas to a critique of language or rather, took a 'linguistic turn' through a reconstructive theory of Marxism and of critical social science which argues that the cognitive interest of the latter is emancipatory. This is a dialectic which is developed in the self-reflection of a social science that recognises that its interests are developed in relation to its subject: society and, through the logic of rational communication, thus the normative construction of content is possible: social science, even positivist social science can be productive of social knowledge as long as it is understood within the wider context of Critical Theory. Science is not separate from the social world then, it is part of it and constructed from there. Therefore, societal interests are paramount and Habermas argues that we must look at the pre-scientific constitution of science. The cognitive or knowledge constitutive interests which Habermas identifies, 'technical', 'practical' and 'emancipatory' and their relationship to the concepts of 'lifeworld' and 'system' are discussed after the 'theory of communicative action' is established as it is applied in the thesis.

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<sup>75</sup> White (1995:4-5) discusses the tension in Habermas's early work (the 1960s) which resulted from his view of Adorno's growing pessimism and the totalization of his critique of Western Modernity which White states Habermas viewed as a 'failure of nerve' by Adorno. 'After returning from exile in the United States and re-establishing the institute at the University of Frankfurt, Adorno had become more disillusioned about the world around him and began to articulate a mode of thinking that he called "negative dialectics" that resisted any affirmative thinking whatsoever about ethics and politics'. White suggests that Habermas was disturbed by the discontinuity or rupture to the optimistic discourse of modernity started by the pre-war Frankfurt School and that he began to view Adorno and Heidegger in the same light because of their total critique of modernity, which Habermas felt could only result in a politics akin to National Socialism, a politics which Heidegger refused to renounce (White states that Heidegger spent the 30 years following the war critiquing what the modern West held dear). Habermas went on to write the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* in the 1980s in which he critiqued those who threatened the discourse of modernity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida and, Adorno and Horkheimer.



## **Habermas's communicative theories and their application to the thesis**

Thus in terms of this thesis, it is Habermas's work on the centrality of rationality and language in human affairs which is important, although the section of writing following immediately will sketch his over-all project through his most notable works whilst focusing on *The Theory of Communicative Action* (TCA). The centrality of language in human affairs, that is to democracy thus freedom, justice and equality is a theme which Habermas began developing from his earliest work. Habermas started his career with *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), followed by the major works *The Logic of the Social Sciences* (1967) *Knowledge and Human Interests* in 1968 and *The Legitimation Crisis* in 1973. In 1970, Habermas began to write *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) and in 1996 *Between Facts and Norms* was published setting out the legal and political implications of TCA. These publications represent just a fraction of Habermas's prolific writing career, however they help to sum up his overall project. Despite changes of track from his earliest thinking (discussed below) there is an underlying theme to much of Habermas's work and his major works can be seen as research programmes geared towards one project<sup>76</sup>. The first generation of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse had concluded that the aspiration of the Enlightenment project to a shape society of freedom and happiness through reason had failed. That is to say that reason as embodied in modernity through science and rationality had come to enslave humanity in a new domination of irrationality and repression,<sup>77</sup> and so they came to believe that the system of modern capitalism could not be broken. The dialectic between 'what is' and 'what ought to be', that is between fact and values, theory and action and thus the attempt to overcome the empiricist

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<sup>76</sup> White (1988:1) states that 'there is a unity of perspective which runs through all of Habermas's thought. Nevertheless, around 1970 some distinctive new themes and directions began to emerge. These include the ideas of communicative rationality, universal pragmatics, communicative ethics, the ideal speech situation, a reconstruction of historical materialism and legitimation crisis in advanced capitalism'. White goes on to say that Habermas refined these ideas and that in TCA in 1981 his various strands of thought were combined into one synthetic version of modernity and Critical Theory.

<sup>77</sup> White (1995:3) also states that: 'In 1947 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer published their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, developing the claim that the systematic pursuit of enlightened reason and freedom had the ironic long-term effect of engendering new forms of irrationality and repression. These critiques had an immense impact both on the initial shape of the work of Jürgen Habermas and on its continued evolution'.

split (McCarthy: 1978:272) had been negated by the success of a totally administered society impervious to critique and thus radical change (Marcuse: 1964; Adorno and Horkheimer: 1944). Habermas however sought to rework the work of the Frankfurt School arguing that science and technology are not inherently ideological and are legitimate human projects, it is only when the 'system' or scientific rationality encroaches into other spheres – 'the lifeworld' – to the exclusion of other values that it becomes illegitimate and this is when it has to be resisted. In this thesis this resistance is theorized through 'immanent transcendence'<sup>78</sup>. This is, the methodological concept which presupposes the dialectical progression from the real to the imagined or utopian communication community in which emancipatory values and 'what ought to be' is debated in the communicative action<sup>79</sup>; identified by Habermas as the ideal speech situation and first theorized by him in *Legitimation Crisis* as the imaginary for a time yet to come but, which, is already implicit in all existing discourse:

The ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor simply a construct, but a reciprocal supposition unavoidable in discourse. This supposition can, but need not be, counterfactual; but even when counterfactual it is a fiction which is operatively effective in communication. I would therefore prefer to speak of an anticipation of an ideal speech situation... This alone is the warrant which allows us to join an actually attained consensus. At the same

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<sup>78</sup> See Strydom (2011: 67) who discusses Habermas's acknowledgment of Pierce as having inaugurated the linguistic-pragmatic turn and in doing so refers to Habermas's explicit mention in the late 1980s of the concept of immanent transcendence. Strydom states that Habermas's engagement with Pierce led him to return to questions of theoretical philosophy – epistemology and ontology. Strydom also states that Habermas connects 'the [this] core Kantian insight in its transformed left-Hegelian guise to Pierce in his paper *Pierce and Communication* (1989). Strydom goes on to state that 'the (this non-epistemic) concept came to form the very core of the title of *Between Facts and Norms*, referring to the tension-laden problem of the immanent realization of transcendent normative structures which from the start in any case have a foothold in ordinary everyday practices, but in the subsequent fifteen years attained a central position in Critical Theory'. The concept of 'reconstruction' which specifies the general methodological structure laid down by immanent transcendence (Strydom: 2011:135) is discussed below in section: *Critical Theory and methodology*.

<sup>79</sup> Honneth and Joas (1991:1) state that: 'In 1981 Habermas published his 'Theory of Communicative Action' as a two-volume book (English language edn, Boston 1984 and 1987). He thus brought to a provisional conclusion the intellectual efforts of twenty years reflection and research. The basic idea informing it, namely that an indestructible moment of communicative rationality is anchored in the social form of human life, is defended in this book by means of a contemporary philosophy of language and science, and is used as the foundation for a comprehensive social theory'. Schnädelbach (1991:19) states that Habermas's inaugural lecture in 1965 '*Knowledge and Human Interests*' 'should now be read as a document in which he emphatically formulates a programme which is brought to completion in the two volumes of *TCA*'. And that 'at that time the idea of searching for the normative foundations of Critical Theory in language was launched, and that ever since, Habermas has through his on-going contact with Karl-Otto Apel, tenaciously attempted to elaborate this'.

time, it is a critical standard against which every actually realized consensus can be called into question and tested (Habermas: 1973: 107-8)

In discussing the reaction to TCA and the international intellectual debates on theory in the social sciences it provoked, Honneth and Joas (1991:2) make a summary of four ‘thematic complexes and the intrinsic links between them’. The description of these four themes made by Honneth and Joas succinctly sum up the central concepts of TCA and the salience of these to this thesis and at the same time point to their problematic and contested nature, which is discussed throughout this section. Honneth and Joas write that:

The four themes are: firstly, the question of a meaningful concept of the *rationality* of actions, persons or forms of life; secondly, the problem of an appropriate *theory of action*; thirdly, the question of the connection between individual actions, in other words, the problem commonly treated in sociology as that of defining a concept of *social order*; fourthly, the diagnosis of *contemporary society* - in other words, analysis of the principal present trends and crisis. ... Roughly speaking, he seeks first to defend a theory of communicative rationality by means of a specific conception of ‘validity claims intrinsic to speech’, in order to resist instrumentalist reductions of rationality as well as those fashionable slogans which put the blame on reason. Secondly, his theory of action is characterised by dichotomously juxtaposing communicative action and instrumental action or strategic action. Thirdly, at the level of a theory of social order, Habermas introduces two concepts: the concept of ‘lifeworld’ and that of ‘system’, which is derived from functionalism ... Honneth and Joas (1991:2)

Honneth and Joas go on to say that ‘Habermas provides a wide-ranging exposition of the historical process in which these two types of order of society separate out and that fourthly, the pair of concepts is also at the heart of Habermas’s diagnosis of society, which above all emphasises the danger to the lifeworld posed by the system imperatives, but at the same time warns against withdrawing the rationality of systemic mechanisms from the domain of the state and *economy*’. Thus Honneth and Joas’s extract demonstrates that Habermas’s theory of communicative action is based on a number of assumptions, theoretical and philosophical constructs, which are: that the rationality of actions, persons or forms of life and social order can be explained in an evolutionary theory which reconstructs historical materialism through a theory of cognitive and moral development and a theory of communication based on a notion of communicative competence and a universal ethic derived from this (Habermas: 1996, a; 191: Habermas : 1996, b; 237-238: Habermas: 1975: 294-295). Furthermore, this is

premised on a functionalist explanation of society as made up of system, sub-systems and lifeworld which are the products of history and that this can be maintained theoretically as the environment in which individuals enter in to intersubjective exchanges through idealized speech acts which are contingent on participants commitment to validity; truth and, one which moreover, relies on the acceptance of the existence of the cultural ideal of the communicative 'lifeworld' (Joas: 1991), which in Habermas's work, is seemingly diametrically opposed to the instrumentalism of a non-communicative system of money and power (Berger: 1991). Indeed, one which is on the verge of colonizing the former by distorting its values through purposive rational action and the medium of language. Moreover, this is a capitalist system facing a crisis of legitimacy, but one which Habermas seemingly, from the Honneth and Joas extract, thinks should be maintained. Indeed, Habermas (1991:250) describes his work thus '... a conceptualization of social life which supplements the concept of lifeworld – developed in action-theoretic terms – with borrowings from systems theory, and thus from the outset exposes itself to charges of its being an eclectic fusion of heterogeneous approaches, models and procedures'. Thus these are problematics in Habermas's work which are in need of further exploration.

### **Universal Pragmatics**

However, firstly, to put these themes into context, a short discussion on Habermas's overall project now follows. Indeed, this discussion will aid an understanding of Habermas's concepts in TCA. So Habermas's over-all project began in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and was developed through *Knowledge and Human Interests*, *Legitimation Crisis* and of course *Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism*. A synopsis of these major works by Habermas is useful in explaining how the theory of communicative action originated. The discussion of these works does not follow a chronology in terms of the year of publication but perhaps in the ideas of Habermas, thus the discussion begins with *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, moves to *Legitimation Crisis* and then *The Theory of Communicative Action* and onto *Between Facts and Norms*. Habermas first presents his systems-theoretical analysis of society in

*Legitimation Crisis* and thus the functionalist based conceptualization of society as consisting of system and lifeworld and it is in this work that the concept of the ‘ideal speech situation’ is first articulated in the context of a universal or ‘formal’ pragmatics as the counterfactual to ‘systematically distorted communication’ and this provides the theoretical framework for the discussion. In the introduction to *Theory and Practice* in a discussion entitled ‘methodological problems’ which alludes to his debate with Gadamer who argued that meaning is context bound, Habermas critiques the hermeneutic disciplines and outlines the approach of critical sociology. This somewhat lengthy quote introduces us to Habermas’s notion or research programme of universal pragmatics ‘the task of which is to identify and reconstruct the conditions of mutual understanding’ (Habermas: 2003: 21).

Confronted with the idealism of the hermeneutics developed for the sciences of the mind, critical sociology guards itself against reducing the meaning complexes objectified within social systems to the contents of cultural tradition. Critical of ideology it asks what lies behind the consensus, presented as fact, that supports the dominant tradition of the time, and does so with a view to the relations of power surreptitiously incorporated in the symbolic structures of the systems of speech and action. The immunizing power of ideologies, which stifle the demands for justification raised by discursive examination, goes back to blockages in communication, independently of the changing semantic contents. These blocks have their origins within the structures of communication themselves, which for certain content limit the options between verbal and non-verbal forms of expression, between the communicative and the cognitive uses of language, and finally between communicative action and discourse, or even exclude such options entirely; they thus require explanation within a framework of a theory of systematically distorted communication. And if such a theory of, in conjunction with a universal pragmatics, could be developed in a satisfactory manner and could be linked convincingly with the precisely rendered fundamental assumptions of historical materialism, then a systematic comprehension of cultural tradition would not be excluded (Habermas: 1974: 11-13)

The theory of universal pragmatics ‘is informed by certain presuppositions about the validity of linguistic interactions which turns on the thesis that everyday language has an in-built connection with validity’ (Maeve Cook in Habermas: 2003: 3). This thesis is discussed in due course, for now though the three claims to validity that Habermas lays down as presuppositions for normative speech acts are: the truth of what is being said by the speaker, the rightness of the speech act in the given context or the underlying norm and the truthfulness of the speaker. The theory of universal pragmatics is inextricably related to

Habermas's theory of communicative competence then, which relates to the speaker's mastery of for example, an ideal speech situation. That is not simply mastery over the grammar of language but also qualification in symbolic interaction or role play behaviour (Rodrigues: 2000: 152) and crucially, the ability to comprehend and speak within a shared universal moral framework. Habermas makes possible this stage of cognitive and moral development in human society through the application of the theories of Piaget (cognitive development) and Kohlberg (moral development).

During the following discussion these and other concepts of Habermas which are most relevant to the conceptual framework of this thesis, for example, 'system', 'lifeworld', 'the ideal speech situation' and 'ideology' are expanded upon, given special focus and attention and their application is explained and reiterated.

### **The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere**

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* which prefigures much of his later work, Habermas begins his project on how power in society is maintained when the control of communication is dominated by the state and vested interests and so the power of debate and thus influence is felt lost to the ordinary citizen. Borrowing from Hannah Arendt (Benhabib: 1992; 74-5; Calhoun: 1992: 8-9), Habermas shows through the conceptualization of a 'public sphere' in 18<sup>th</sup> century America, Britain and France that an educated citizenry or 'literate bourgeois' (Outhwaite: 1996:7) were able to engage with politics – in coffee-houses and salons - through newspapers and able, through reason and the challenging of accepted tradition, to generate a genuine political opinion. However, the active political life of the citizen came to an end when a capitalist middle-class triumphed and newspapers became commercialized and interested in other things, for example advertising. The reading public ceased to be critical and the state began to administer the system in rival teams of administrators and public opinion became a social psychological variable to be manipulated through opinion polls (and the media steering mechanism). Thus the 'critical assessment of public policy in rational discussion, oriented to a concept of the public sphere turns in to what Habermas calls the manipulated public sphere in which states and corporations use

‘publicity’ to manage public opinion’ (Outhwaite: 1996:8). Through this management, democracy, that is, the elections of political parties to government, becomes a meaningless plebiscite between what are in essence, identical teams engaged in the technocratic administration of society. Indeed, in *Legitimation Crisis* Habermas argues that when states and capitalism are subject to periodic if not increasing crises then their legitimacy is called into question as are the means used by the administration to maintain the system. The central thesis of *Legitimation Crisis* bears an uncanny resemblance to the situation facing the political administrations today in the UK and across Europe, that is in the wake of the Great Recession (particularly with regard to the anti-politics movements of the right and left), and particularly with regard to the erosion of two party politics in the UK. Habermas’s thesis is that it is the ‘rational’ attempts of the state to intervene (through steering mechanisms) in the various historical forms of capitalism, monopoly, organised and competitive that have paradoxically, and thus ironically, led to the crises of late capitalism. Slattery (2003:229) states that: ‘The notion of legitimation crises arises in Habermas’s work from the notion that the growth of scientific and technical knowledge, the rationalization of society through state planning is counterproductive; it generates ever increasing expectations (e.g. health and wealth) that it cannot satisfy. This undermines public faith and creates a crisis of legitimation, a disillusion with the false promises of capitalism to create a better life’. This refers then to the crisis of the welfare state. In his paper: *What does a crisis mean today?*

*Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism* Habermas put it like this:

... ... I would join Claus Offe in advocating the theory that late-capitalist societies are facing two difficulties caused by the state having to intervene in the growing functional gaps in the market. We can regard the state as a system that uses legitimate power. Its output consists in sovereignly executing administrative decisions. To this end, it needs an input of mass loyalty that is as unspecific as possible. Both directions can lead to crisis like disturbances. Output crises have the form of efficiency crises. The administrative system fails to fulfil the steering imperative that it has taken over from the economic system. This results in the disorganisation of different areas of life. Input crises have the form of legitimation crises. The legitimation system fails to maintain the necessary level of mass loyalty. We can clarify this with the example of the acute difficulty in public finances with which all late-capitalist societies are now struggling (Habermas: 1973: 655).

However, in this paper, Habermas identifies three developing crises which threaten the stability or balance of the system, the ecological, the international and the anthropological. The ecological refers to the threat to the environment caused by for example the industrial pollutants used by capitalism from the industrial revolution to the present day, the threat to the international balance is the likelihood of conflict, war even nuclear and the threat of mutually assured destruction (MAD) and 'the anthropological' importantly deals with communication. Habermas (1973:651-2) suggests here that there are cultural arrangements separate to but which are also part of the system (e.g., lifeworlds) possessing interpretative frameworks specific to inner human nature, in that they are representative of an innate identity, and identities which come to accept the norms of the system: this is the communicative organization of behaviour. This involves the socialization of the inner nature of autonomous individuals in a system that becomes increasingly complex as indeed the administrative authorities (strategic actions) become increasingly independent of the original motivations of members in organisations (e.g., universities) which are also independent yet part of the system. Habermas is saying here that the acceptance of the norms and values of the system is part of the legitimation process of the system and that although the socialization of members, that is the individual, represents compliance, there is an independence retained through identity - culture. It is only when the system ceases to pass its norms through the interpretative framework of its members for justification (legitimation) that this reciprocal form of communication breaks down and the system forces through decisions, via the media steering mechanism, without discussion, as the ideological (economic) interests of the state become the new norm against the emancipatory needs of its members<sup>80</sup>; Habermas has described this as the uncoupling of the media sub-system and

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<sup>80</sup> In discussing the internal nature (the autonomy) and the identity of the individual who realise their needs in a utopian dimension, and whilst quoting from Habermas's *Moral Development and Ego Identity*, Benhabib (1985: 90) points to the reciprocity and discursive freedom required to validate a system of legitimation: 'The requirement that a "truthful" interpretation of needs also be part of discursive argumentation means that ego autonomy cannot and should not be achieved at the expense of internal repression. Thus Habermas writes: "Internal nature is thereby moved in a utopian perspective; that is, that at this stage internal nature may no longer be merely examined within an interpretive framework fixed by the cultural condition in a nature like way....' Benhabib, referring



lifeworld<sup>81</sup>. That is, the perspective of members in the lifeworld, differ from the world view of the system or its steering mechanisms. (Habermas: 1991: 255-7). As Shapiro (1984: 26) states: 'For Habermas, the problem of what he calls 'system integration' (broadly understood as the problems of the economic sphere) lead to crisis [social pathologies] only when they pose a threat to 'social integration', that is when they undermine the consensual foundations of social institutions'<sup>82</sup>. The dynamic of these human and non-human interests are discussed now in the conceptual framework of the thesis which theorizes that the interpretative framework of higher education fails to recognise the norms of the state with regard to excellence but is without the communicative sphere in which to deliberate its position.

### **Human Interests:**

In *knowledge and Human Interests* Habermas established the proper role of knowledge in human affairs. Habermas argued that all knowledge is the consequence of the

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now to communicative competence and the ability of the individual to reason about the good-life goes on: 'Ego autonomy is characterized by a twofold capacity: first, the individual's reflexive ability (and presumably freedom) to question the interpretive framework fixed by the cultural tradition - to loosen, if you wish, those sedimented and frozen images of the good and happiness in the light of which we formulate needs and motives; second, such reflexive questioning is accompanied by an ability to articulate one's needs linguistically, by an ability to communicate with others about them'. Habermas quote from: "*Moral Development and Ego Identity*," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 93.

<sup>81</sup> Habermas (1991:60) describes uncoupling thus: 'the proposition of the uncoupling of the lifeworld leads to the description of mutually contradictory tendencies'. ...'one group ensues from the –still class-specific – anchoring of the steering media in the lifeworld and presses for the implementation of lifeworldly imperatives in the form of restrictions imposed on the capitalist mode of operation in the economic system and the bureaucratic mode in the administrative system. The other group, the counter trends, overlay the the lifeworld with forms of structurally-alien economic and administrative rationality. The former signifies a strengthening of of the 'institutional framework that subjects system maintenance to the normative restrictions of the lifeworld, the latter a consolidation of the of existing class structures and thus a base that subordinates the lifeworld to the systemic constraints of material reproduction and thereby 'mediatizes it. (TCA: Vol 2; 85)

<sup>82</sup> It is important to differentiate between the idealized notion of the lifeworld, for example, that of the university, from the differentiated structures of a 'rationalized lifeworld'. White (1988:116), in demonstrating how Habermas reinterprets the pathological effects of Weber's disenchantment process, states that 'it is not the differentiation and development of value spheres according to their own logic [which] leads to the cultural impoverishment of everyday life but the elitist splitting off of expert cultures from the contexts of everyday practice'. In short, it is not the differentiated structures of a rationalized lifeworld which are themselves the problem but rather the fact that increasingly specialized forms of argumentation become the guarded preserve of experts and thereby lose contact with the understanding processes of the majority of individuals'. White goes on to say 'that like the process of reification the process of insulating expertise has a deforming effect on everyday life as participation via validity claims is increasingly short circuited'. White goes on to discuss how in the context of the moral-legal sphere, Habermas refers to professionals as a necessity even in the simplest of legal matters and that planners and policy 'experts' make a wide-range of decisions with extensive normative impact on everyday life, claiming in the process to have some sort of scientific justification'. See also: Habermas (1991: 224-225).

process of people creating and recreating themselves through labour. That is humanity pursuing its basic human interest. Moreover, there is a necessary relationship between the form of knowledge and the uses to which it can be put. The three basic interests are: making things, communicating self-knowledge and self-determination. Each of these interests are related to three characteristic modes of thinking, which in turn create the possibility of three bodies of systematic knowledge: empirical analytical, historical hermeneutic and critical and human advance is bound up with the refinement and the extension of this basic thinking, each with its own inner logic of development in disciplines and institutions and practices. Thus Habermas (2005) identified three strands of knowledge or cognitive interests that correspond with the three sciences: the approach of the empirical analytical sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a practical one; and the approach of the critically oriented sciences incorporates the emancipatory cognitive interests. These three strands of knowledge interests are inextricably related to the interpretation of excellence as it is understood in this thesis and, outside the academy in the political administration: technical, practical and emancipatory interests can be argued to exist in the Hellenic conception of excellence – the utilitarian conception is perhaps represented only by technical and practical interests. Habermas argues that it is when the technical interest of capitalism becomes dominant in society, through instrumental or strategic action which treats people and or institutions as objects of manipulation, that distortion in communication and thus thinking and action occurs (Habermas: 1974; 12). Thus the thesis argues that the political discourse of excellence, competition and competitiveness defined as the economic imperative of the state creates a distortion in language and thinking which begins to eclipse transformative excellence and thus the practical and emancipatory interests of society. White (1995:6) states that ‘Habermas announced that a rational basis for collective life would be achieved only when social relations were organized, ‘according to the principle that the validity of every norm of political consequence be made dependent on a consensus arrived at in communication free

from domination'<sup>83</sup>. Thus this thesis argues that when system imperatives becomes too dominant then battles of resistance take place on the borders of the lifeworld and system (Delanty: 2011: 73), hence transformative, emancipatory excellence should be argued for through the counterfactual speech act: that is the ideal speech situation which imagines the ideal communication community and decisions taken on the basis of rational deliberation and agreement. Phillips describes the ideal speech situation thus:

In the ideal speech situation, *consensus* is achieved in unrestrained and universal discourse. A grounded, rational consensus is one that arises from a speech situation totally free from all internal and external constraints, i.e., one that is due entirely to the force of the better argument. The stipulation that the consensus arrived at must be constraint free guarantees that the consensus expresses the desire of all – the *common interest*. Thus, ideal speech requires the existence of an ideal community, for only in such circumstances is the equality of communicative competence, and the exclusion of all motives 'except for that of the cooperative search for truth'. [Thus] the ideal speech situation itself represents an ideal. (Phillips: 1986: 79)

Thus and in pursuing the political imaginary argumentatively, through the theoretical approach as represented through Fairclough and Fairclough (2012:24) in the introduction to this thesis, and above in the section *Eudaimonia: excellence in existence*, the ideal speech situation represents an ideal communication space in which those in higher education could express their ideas about excellence and the purpose of the university as they see it and debate this against what this thesis argues from research is the economic imperative intruding on the lifeworld of the academy – 'the political discourse of excellence' (*ibid*). As such, the ideal speech situation represents only a metaphorical space<sup>84</sup> in which to express

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<sup>83</sup> Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston Beacon Press, 1971)

<sup>84</sup> White (1995: 107-11) in a section called *Critical Theory and Applied Social Science* discusses how drawing on Habermas's work, critical policy analysts can apply the normative framework of the ideal speech situation to challenge the instrumental action of the system; challenge policy agenda manipulation and elucidate socializing forces which distort the assumptions of those who participate in policy formation and implementation and can also attempt to change the 'design' of institutions which this thesis does not attempt. However, White also discusses how Habermas has spoken for the need for institutional design to promote 'communicative power' over administrative power. White goes on to say that there is no implication that there is an attempt to institutionalize the ideal speech situation but simply a recognition that institutions and practices can indeed be constructed [designed] to promote communicative rationality and limit instrumental rationality. White continues by saying that there are few world exemplars but that there have been an increasing number of innovations whose very claims to legitimacy rests on their achievement of informed participation and consent of all parties to the dispute'. White ends by stating that it is not certain that critical theorists want to engage with the state in administration of institutions for fear of becoming complicit and after

the desire that higher education be directed towards realization of the good life and thus part of a collective discussion to that end<sup>85</sup>. That is, that ‘excellence’ (is eudaimonic) and is a legitimating principle of higher education and that this philosophical view of the world can provide the basis of a shared good-life which is transformative for society in that it continuously develops the uniquely human skills and talents of its members’ (*ibid*) and leads ultimately to happiness (<sup>86</sup>Benhabib: 1984: 81). However, although the ISS is a purely hypothetical space, it begs the question of where now, in the public sphere, in the real world of communication the university can express itself freely. The material from the research interviews which support this thesis suggests not only that excellence is viewed in the academy as eudaimonic, but that this is a view which is not heard publicly, moreover that the political relationship between the university leadership and the state which is mediated through the mission groups precludes the public articulation of this emancipatory aspect of excellence. That is to say, that there exists a political constraint which prevents a full presentation and deliberation of the interests of higher education. Indeed, this is argued to be prevented by demands of adherence to the economic imperative which prevent a voice being given to transformative excellence. Thus the thesis argues that if constraints were removed in an ideal speech situation the views expressed in the interviews would be expressed

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pointing out that those running them might not take kindly to having their communicative and other competencies challenged, but that constructive critique can encompass both reform of and continued confrontation with the state from outside e.g. by New Social Movements (NSM). These are then, other applications of the ideal speech situation, which as White points out Habermas intended, as a standard by which to judge and critique existing relations. It is not a social action per se then. (Habermas: 1991: 242): ‘speech acts can link the action plans of one actor with those of others via rationally motivating achievements in reaching understanding - rather than by exerting influence, i.e. through empirical intervention’ (Habermas: 1991: 223). However, Barnett (2000: 182) points to Habermas’s clarification of the ideal speech situation in interview (Dews: 1986: 174) in which he describes how the conditions for the claims of truth and rightness can be redeemed, presupposing as Barnett argues, that the ISS is not just an ideal but is presupposed in everyday rational language. The question that arises from this position is, then, how do we develop systematically or build on the conditions to speak for the university?

<sup>85</sup> Critical Theory’s reconstructive explanatory critique has to pass through ‘the crucible’ of scientific-public validation and thus prove itself discursively as a theoretical and practical endeavour through social scientific and public argumentation (Strydom: 2011: 158-163) which could have the effect of operationalizing the ISS. See also thus Barnett (1990: 60), who states that the fundamental principle of the ideal speech situation is ‘the willingness to expose one’s view point to the critical gaze of others’ and that Habermas has termed this the consensus theory of truth.

<sup>86</sup> See Benhabib’s *The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics* for a discussion on the potential of discursive action and how the ideal speech situation might (theoretically) attain ‘happiness’.

publicly also. This argument is discussed and elucidated through presentation of research interview material in chapters five and six.

### **The contradiction at the heart of the lifeworld:**

In view of the notion expressed at the outset of this thesis, that there is an economic imperative intruding on the lifeworld of the university, the discussion now turns to ideology and other contested notions in Habermas's work including that of 'lifeworld' (a broader discussion of ideology follows this section of writing during an explication of critical discourse analysis). Habermas's theory of communication rests on the assumption that agreement can be found through debate and crucially, rests on the notion of a universal ethic. As is suggested in the Honneth and Joas (1991:2) extract above, his theory of speech acts and action is problematic as is the theory of rationality and these are discussed in due course. Moreover, Habermas has been accused of effectively abandoning Critical Theory as his work shows an acceptance of liberal-democracy as the only game in town, and crucially in terms of this thesis, it is also argued (Cook: 2003: 195), that he has accepted Daniel Bell's *End of Ideology* thesis and become either 'a positivist or liberal ideologue'<sup>87</sup> (Cook:2003;190)<sup>88</sup>. Firstly though, before discussing the philosophical position of Habermas's work and the implications for this thesis but whilst still using Cook as a starting point, the concept of lifeworld as it applies here is reiterated. In the introduction to this thesis Habermas's definition of lifeworld was quoted thus: 'the background resources, contexts, and dimensions of social action that enable actors to cooperate on the basis of mutual understanding: shared cultural systems of meaning, institutional orders that stabilize patterns

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<sup>87</sup> See Benhabib (1997) for review of *Between Facts and Norms* in which she describes Habermas's acceptance of the two-track view of institutions and the logic of the system of money and power as mechanisms for coordinating and solving collective action problems: two-track refers to the existence of a free public sphere and a civil society of associations, social movements and citizens initiatives which exist alongside representative institutions. However, this represents a rejection of a united collective will and the Marxian critique of representative democracy as utopian and wrong. It is a rejection of left-communitarianism then.

<sup>88</sup> Cook (2003:197) describes *Between Facts and Norms* as one of the great works of political theory but that 'what rankles is its entirely affirmative [positivist] stance'. However, she goes on to say that 'the ideal presuppositions of communicative reason do manage to retain their critical leverage [through implication and not Habermas's philosophical position] but that Habermas denies them because they are derived from liberalism. Cook's paper is a reply to Finlayson's (2003) critique of her defence of Adorno's position on ideology and Habermas's critique of this.

of action, and personality structures acquired in family, church, neighbourhood, and school' (*ibid*). Similarly, the thesis takes the concept of 'lifeworld' as a cultural universe (the context), in which actors exist and communicate shared experiences and cognitive understandings' (*ibid*). In other words, the thesis takes the institution of higher education as having its own life, cultural existence – its own interpretative framework - and this presupposes that it is informed by values distinct, different at least to other spheres of the system but still reflects wider society. Indeed, Habermas (1991: 224) sets out three structural components of lifeworld as culture, society, personality or 'person'; thus individual identity is also an important component of this concept. Kemmis (2000: 91-103) takes a lengthy extract from Habermas which nonetheless describes the 'complex social matrix' of the lifeworld:

Considered as a *resource*, the lifeworld is divided in accord with the 'given' components of speech acts (that is, their propositional, illocutionary, and intentional components) into culture, society and person. I call *culture* the store of knowledge from which those engaged in communicative action draw interpretations susceptible of consensus as they come to an understanding about something in the world. I call *society* (in the narrower sense of a component of the life-world) the legitimate orders from which those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity, based on belonging to groups, as they enter into personal relationships with one another. *Personality* serves as a term of art for acquired competences that render a subject capable of speech and action and hence able to participate in processes of mutual understanding in a given context and to maintain his own identity in the shifting contexts of interaction. This conceptual strategy breaks with the traditional conception – also held by the philosophy of subject and praxis philosophy – that societies are composed of collectivities and these in turn of individuals. Individuals and groups are 'members' of a lifeworld only in a metaphorical sense.

The symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld does take place as a circular process. The structural nuclei of the lifeworld are 'made possible' by their correlative processes of reproduction, and these in turn are 'made possible' by contributions of communicative action. Cultural reproduction ensures that (in the semantic dimension) newly arising situations can be connected up with existing conditions in the world; it takes care of the coordination of action by means of legitimately regulated interpersonal relationships and lends constancy to the identity of groups. Finally, the socialization of members ensures that newly arising situations (in the dimension of historical time) can be connected up with existing world conditions; it secures the acquisition of generalized capacities for action for future generations and takes care of harmonizing individual life-histories and collective life forms. Thus, interpretive schemata susceptible of consensus (or 'valid knowledge'), legitimately ordered interpersonal relationships (or 'solidarities'), and capacities for interaction (or

‘personal identities’) are renewed in these three processes of reproduction. (Habermas: 1987b; 343-4, original emphasis)

Thus there are cultural arrangements in society – ‘the lifeworld’ - which are separate from, but at the same time, part of the system – the world - and which provide an environment in which communicative practice interprets the world, society and reproduces its own culture, providing the basis for action. Delanty and Strydom (2003: 382-3) in describing Habermas’s philosophical position in 1999 state that ‘he renews his claim of a ‘transcendental-pragmatic cognitive realism’ that is based on a ‘weak naturalism’ yet at the same time makes room for a cognitive ‘constructivist thrust’ of social subjects within their sociocultural lifeworld who deal not only intelligently with a ‘risky and disillusioning reality’ but also morally with a ‘social world . . . which they themselves design . . . as a universe they themselves still have to realize’. Habermas’s later position is developed from this and this is discussed below in due course through Strydom (2011). However, this quote from Delanty and Strydom perhaps sums up the concept of the life-world this thesis applies, in that it defines the lifeworld as a universe facing a risky present and uncertain future but one able to realize its own potentiality. Thus in reiterating, the thesis argues that the economic imperative – the political discourse of excellence – impinges on and intrudes into the lifeworld of the university; it enters into the world of higher education. Thus as the political discourse of excellence is defined here as competition and competitiveness, indicative of neoliberal ideology, that is the efficiency of the free market and the state’s uncoupling from the public realm through the privatization of services, then it is also argued that there is an ideology impinging, intruding – entering into the university. There is perhaps a distinction to be made however between the political discourse of excellence as it was defined at the outset of this thesis, competition in the guise of national and global research performance assessment and ranking, consumer quality assurance in the form of the NSS and neoliberalism per se. Competition and competitiveness directly gear the university to ‘victory’ in ‘the global race’, neoliberalism is also as Finlayson (2003) (*ibid*) argues representative of the new working practices and these impinge, intrude, enter into the

lifeworld. That is, those practices introduced following the demise of the post-war settlement and the crisis of the Fordist economies and welfare states in the 1970s (Fairclough: 2013: 11). For example, privatization, efficiency, flexible working and zero hours contracts which have entered the English university with regard to its estate management and employment and in teaching contracts (Bhambra: 2013). The notion that the state should no longer pay for higher education and invert the concept of the public good is of course represented through the introduction and increase in tuition fees and the demise of the teaching grant in many subjects. However, the thesis argues that this has not yet completely undermined the consensual foundations of our institution and that the emancipatory interpretation of excellence remains an essential aspect of its norms and values, and that the interpretative framework of higher education remains intact, independent, despite the technical interests of the state becoming ever more demanding. A vice-chancellor who was interviewed as part of the research for this thesis (vice-chancellor at 1994 Group, Robbins university) said that if we extrapolate from current government policy then ‘we would end up with the neoliberal university’ but for now the university remains an institution with all the potential of critical mass – it is still an institution that is capable of critiquing, challenging and, changing the status quo. The vice-chancellor of a suburban London post-92 and the Vice-Chancellor of big civic and a representative of Universities UK said that higher education remained a dynamic transformative force for individuals who were able to participate in it and a source of well-being and of economic dynamism for the communities in which universities are situated. One academic though talked of a sense of a loss of collegiality from his university due to its increasing bureaucratization and the development of a corporation like managerial structure which ignored the views of academics. Indeed, and when first asked about excellence he said he thought it a ‘meaningless’ performance measure, however, he changed his mind when reminded of its Hellenic origins and said that when all was said and done lecturers and students still aspire to this ideal; it is still the culture of the university<sup>89</sup> (Doctor of Education, 1994 Group university).

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<sup>89</sup> With regard to the intrusion of instrumental forces in to higher education and the maintenance of



## **Methodological problems and theoretical issues associated with lifeworld and ideology**

So as suggested, there are theoretical and methodological issues which arise from the use of Habermas's lifeworld and ideology in this thesis. The purpose of this next section of writing is to address these methodological and theoretical concerns. Cook's (2003) *A Response to Finlayson* provides a useful way in to these concerns. Firstly, Cook takes issue with Finlayson's interpretation of Habermas's arguments and the way that lifeworld is defined, debates the extent of its colonization, and how and whether strategic, instrumental, and (or) functional imperatives (i.e., ideology) intrude on which structural aspect of the rationalized lifeworld (Cook argues that Habermas colonization thesis refers specifically to the incursion of functionalist imperatives into the family, not the work place). Cook (195-6) also disputes Habermas's intentions with regard to the ideal speech situation (i.e. it was not intended as a critical standard) and argues, whilst criticising Finlayson (2003:) for his proposed application of a systematic moral and ethical examination of the normative validity claims of the system, by stating that nowhere in Habermas's writing does he hold this up as normative standard from which we can judge the reality of communicative rationality in our own society. To quote: 'Finlayson merely juxtaposes his view to mine when he asserts without argument that Habermas's ideal presuppositions can serve as standards for criticisms. She goes on to say that 'No quotes from Habermas support this claim' and, that 'Finlayson does not attempt to show how the critical presuppositions of communicative reason serve a critical function'. It is not entirely clear whether Cook is referring to the absence of a supporting quote from Finlayson or Habermas himself, however, for the

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the academic-lifeworld the following participant said: 'I can tell you that in nearly eleven years in this university no minister has ever, ever either implied or rung me up or said to me that anything that happens in this university is not appropriate, we decide what we do here, if you work in the NHS the minister is never off the phone if you're a chief executive. We have no idea how fortunate we are in higher education, in the way that we are left alone to do our business. Now I'm a tax payer and I'm a voter. Higher education is too important to the country now for the government not to have policy. And it's perfectly reasonable for the mandated government of the day to have policy in higher education. And what I get is that they set policy: 'can you widen participation please? We will create a more competitive market, that's a policy – you get on and sort out how you deal with that' [participant's emphasis added]. But the idea that because there's a more competitive market in higher education and that's going to change the nature of the academic world is just absurd. Do you think I can tell what our physics people what to do – that's just absurd!' (Vice-chancellor and representative of Universities UK).

avoidance of doubt, the quote from *Legitimation Crisis* (Habermas: 1973: 107-8) in which Habermas does show how his critical presuppositions can act as a standard is represented above in the section *Habermas's communicative theories and their application to the thesis*. The way that the ideal speech situation serves as an ideal is also of course represented above through Phillips (1986: 79) under the section *Human Interests* and through Benhabib (1985) immediately after this section. Moreover, White (*ibid*) was also cited above to show how Habermas's ideal presuppositions might be used empirically. Thus this thesis justifies its theoretical and hypothetical exploration of the ideal speech situation as the space for excellence to be argued for by those in higher education. With regard to Cook's more general assertion (ambiguous though it may be) that Habermas's critical presuppositions of communicative reason cannot serve a critical function in the way that Finlayson attempts to apply them<sup>90</sup> are unevidenced in text, Habermas does in fact refer to a systematic moral and ethical examination of discourse in *Discourse ethics* (in Outhwaite, 1996: 180-193). This thesis has already pointed to the argumentative turn in political theory and thus to the contemporary relevance of the speech act through Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) and Finlayson (2007: 550) as a communicative space in which to argue the case for excellence. The concept of lifeworld is now considered beginning with criticisms made by Cook and then moves to debates taken and developed from essays in Honneth and Joas's *Communicative Action* (1991) and indeed, Habermas's reply to these. Firstly, and with regard to the independence of this realm of existence, Cook (2003:191) claims that it has never been as immune from the colonising effects of the economic and political subsystems as Habermas claimed and, moreover, that 'borrowed from phenomenology his concept of lifeworld retains its predecessor's naïve claims about a realm of human activity that is relatively untainted by political and economic forces'. She goes on to point to the distinction between lifeworld and system and states that this is not simply 'a categorical one' but it

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<sup>90</sup> As stated in the introductory chapter to the thesis, Finlayson (2003) argues that once an economic imperative intruding on the lifeworld has been shown to be ideological and thus unmasked as a strategic or instrumental demand of the system and money and power then it is subject to prosecution by moral and ethical discourse: in effect, a critical discourse analysis.

‘presupposes a social ontology that trenchantly divides the domains of symbolic and material reproduction. These concerns were referred to earlier by way of the extract from Honneth and Joas (1991:2). The methodological concerns relating to the contradiction of system and social integration represented by the dichotomous relationship of lifeworld and system and a rational communicative world juxtaposed with a non-communicative world of economic reproduction were elucidated and perhaps to some extent negated by the extracts above<sup>91</sup>. However, and in expediting the discussion further, the following extract from Habermas’s *Reply* to these essays is useful. In countering Cook in part, and, supporting the arguments in this thesis, Habermas (1991:225-6) in addressing Seel’s (1991) remarks on the procedural concept of reason in TCA and replying to his theoretical question as to which channels and with what differing effects the interchange between expert culture and forms of life actually occur in modern societies states that:

This question cannot be answered independently of a sociological investigation of the exchange between media-steered subsystems and the quite differently structured domains of the lifeworld. However,... ..If one separates the form of the increasingly general differentiated structures of the lifeworld from the contents of the increasingly particularized totalities of forms of life (which are nevertheless intermeshed in the form of ‘family resemblance’), then the concept of rationalized lifeworld can no longer embrace what was once meant with the concept of the good life. The conflicts within modern lifeworlds have, after all, not diminished with the advancing rationalization of the lifeworld. Rather, the forms in which social pathologies manifested have multiplied – loss of meaning, anomic conditions, psychopathologies are the most noticeable, but by no means the only symptoms – I still explain these pathologies by referring to the mechanism driving capitalism forward, namely economic growth, but I assess them in terms of the systematically induced predominance of economic and bureaucratic, indeed of all cognitive-instrumental forms of rationality within a one-sided or alienated everyday communicative practice... .. The yardstick thus used intuitively to measure the deformation of forms of life consists of the free interplay of the cognitive-instrumental with both the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive, within an everyday practice which must be open to an uninhibited and balanced interpenetration of cognitive interpretations, moral expectations, expressions and valuations. (Habermas: 1991; 225-6).

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<sup>91</sup> See also Schnädelbach (1991: 17) who points out that lifeworld is a concept taken from epistemology developed in the context of a transcendental philosophy or phenomenology. ‘This ties the concept to the first person singular of researcher, or to the plural community of researchers, who, in reflecting on the ‘conditions of possibility’ of their knowledge, encounter an insurmountable horizon of their possibilities for understanding and knowledge; here ‘lifeworld’ designated a priori, which for all its substantive content, is never quite objectifiable ... ..’ Schnädelbach here perhaps asks for or implies that some empirical evidence of the lifeworld is necessary to discern the complex and subjective/intersubjective experience of the lifeworld.

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That is, the ideal presuppositions (e.g. discourse ethics and the ISS) expressed (as a standard, ‘yardstick’) by Habermas to counter the reifying effects of the economic imperative – ‘alienated everyday communicative practice’ - on the lifeworld which is represented here by Habermas as a form with an increasingly general differentiated structure of the economic system but, consisting of particular forms of life, i.e. different domains or cultures ( a ‘complex social matrix’ *ibid*), with differing perspectives to the system imperatives (*ibid*) presupposing that there are indeed different – independent - lifeworlds but that these are affected by the mechanism driving capitalism forward – economic growth, whether this is defined as a functional, instrumental or a strategic imperative: ‘all cognitive-instrumental forms of rationality’<sup>92</sup> (*ibid*) . Cook’s claim that the colonization thesis underestimates the colonization of the lifeworld is also countered by this extract from Habermas which suggests a complex interaction in what is, to a degree, the mutually reciprocating system of capitalism.

In replying to Krüger (1991) Habermas again emphasizes the importance of communicative practice in the life-world and countering criticisms of a dualism in his theory states that:

system and lifeworld by no means behave toward one another as macrolevel and microlevel. The lifeworld continues to be the more comprehensive of concept of order given that the media-steered subsystems are differentiated out from the social component of the lifeworld via the specialization of the universal medium of language. To this extent, the material reproduction of the lifeworld is not ‘leased out to’ to systems theory, because the mode of production and social formations depend on the manner in which mechanisms for system integration are institutionally anchored in the lifeworld. Habermas (1991:262)

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<sup>92</sup> See Barnett (1990: 112) who in defining Habermas’s concept of rationality states that there are essentially two different forms of rationality intimately linked with two forms of action. ‘Cognitive-instrumental rationality’ is linked to ‘action oriented to success’ and that within this form of rationality can be distinguished two sub forms. ‘Instrumental’ refers to the following technical rules and can be evaluated in terms of efficiency and ‘strategic’ which can be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in influencing the decisions of other social actors (typically in the world of politics or business). Barnett goes on to say that the associated form of action here – communicative rationality - is one in which actors work jointly to understand each other, and to influence each other purely by the force of argument, i.e. the ideal speech situation. See Barnett (1990: 60&90)

The lifeworld is inextricably linked to the system then, in a complex differentiation but, is still separate, it is not one system. Different lifeworlds, that is media-steered subsystems lose the social component through the specialization of language, (in expert culture for example) however, the system, the mode of production and the shape of society is anchored in the institutions of the lifeworld which presupposes a total colonization of the lifeworld and so an 'unbreakable cage'<sup>93</sup>, whilst however, also illustrating why Habermas's explosive communicative moment is rooted in the conditions of the lifeworld. It is the colonization of the lifeworld which Cook focuses most attention on, arguing that because the system imperatives have made such great incursions into it that the notion of ideology is negated or perhaps more accurately, the critique of and resistance to it is precluded by the level of cultural disenchantment in which ideologies have no way of sustaining, in the long run, their power to convince (White: 1998; 117). Indeed, White (1998:117) asks the following question with regard to the deadening of ideology under the impoverished conditions of cultural disenchantment, in other words, he asks what has replaced ideology: 'if ideology in this classical sense has been disintegrating, does that not mean that the opposition between social and systemic integration should become increasingly apparent? The answer according to Habermas, White states, is no, stating:

And here is where the phenomenon of cultural impoverishment comes into play. In advanced capitalism, this splitting off of expert cultures helps generate a 'functional equivalent' for ideologies. The latter had to facilitate the social integration in a positive way by providing some overall interpretive framework for core aspects of social life. Today, however, this function is performed negatively, in the sense of systematically hindering everyday knowledge, from reaching the 'the level of articulation' of an ideology. What Habermas seems to be arguing here is that, as the insulation of expert cultures grows, so does the incapacity of the average individual to make effective use of the cognitive arsenal of cultural modernity. '*Everyday consciousness* is robbed of its

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<sup>93</sup> See White (1995: 8-9) who describes the colonization of lifeworld as intended by Habermas to mean that the increasing rationalization of society has led to the expansion of social sub-systems which coordinate action through the media of money (capitalist economy) and administrative power (modern centralized states). The initially beneficial expansion of these media has progressed to the point where they invade areas of social life that could have been or could be coordinated by the medium of understanding or 'solidarity'. This is 'the colonization of the lifeworld'. This brings a growing sense of meaninglessness and dwindling freedom. However, as White points out, Habermas's thesis is that this could be resisted; 'it is not an unbreakable cage'. This resistance would however be progressive only to the extent that it built upon the cultural potential of modernity in accord with the universal norm or ethic and as such in opposition to postmodern and poststructuralist analytical approaches to society.

synthesising power; it becomes *fragmented*'. The citizen of advanced industrial society is bombarded with greater quantities of information but knowledge which results from it remains 'diffuse' and difficult to employ in critical ways (White: 1998: 117).

White goes on to represent a quote from Habermas in which the latter states that false consciousness has been replaced by a fragmented consciousness which prevents the realisation of the mechanism which creates reification. In other words, people are unable to see the wood for the trees, so to speak, they do not perceive the deadening effect of the economic imperative, diffused and diffracted by a million rays of light. Habermas goes on to say in this extract that the conditions for a colonization of the lifeworld are therefore fulfilled because the ideological veil is stripped away; there appears to be no overarching narrative or imperative, and the independent subsystems press in from the outside on the lifeworld and compel assimilation like colonial masters in a tribal society. 'The perspectives of the native culture are so scattered that they cannot be coordinated sufficiently to allow the workings of the metropole and world market to be deciphered from a peripheral standpoint'<sup>94</sup>. Thus White (1998: 117) goes on to say that 'ideology critique in this sense must be replaced by the critique of cultural impoverishment and fragmentation of everyday consciousness. And that for this task, the communicative model and the associated idea of the rational potential of modernity provide the critical foothold'. Finally, White states that, 'these conceptions together give Habermas a comprehensive viewpoint from which he can give substance to his idea of systematic distortions of communication. And what is to be explained under this rubric is how the organization of knowledge and practical deliberation in contemporary society systematically undermine the potential of a rationalized lifeworld'.

However, previous sections of this thesis have shown that Habermas did not define colonization as an accomplished fact<sup>95</sup> and as the extract from Habermas represented earlier

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<sup>94</sup> Habermas quote taken by White (1988) from *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns*, Vol 11, *Zur Kritik der functionalistischen Vernunft*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp

<sup>95</sup> Habermas (1991: 261) stated with regard to his philosophical position and in a reply to essays which sought to critique and clarify his position in TCA, that he by 'no means opted for the state which Marx characterized in his day as the complete subsumption of the lifeworld under the imperatives of a production process when he emphasizes the intrinsic evolutionary value exhibited by steering media such as money and power '... ...I believe for empirical reasons that there is no longer

indicated, only a sociological investigation of the exchange between lifeworld and the media steered subsystems can answer the question as to what the reality of the relationship between different worlds is and, how this is understood - perceived. This thesis cannot claim to do this but it does argue that the lifeworld of the university is an independent domain – within the system - and the material taken from research interviews will support this in an argument which logically supports the fundamental premise of this thesis. That is that excellence defined as an emancipatory goal is a legitimating principle of English higher education. It is acknowledged however, that it is possible to argue that the university itself is a media-steered subsystem given its role in the coordination and administration of the system of money and power and indeed, its reproduction. Moreover, given the esoteric nature of its intellectual activity, higher education could also in part be argued to be an elitist expert culture removed from the practice of everyday life. That is to say, an environment where increasingly specialized forms of argumentation become the guarded preserve of experts, thereby losing contact with the understanding processes of the majority of individuals (*ibid*) and preventing the articulation of alternative values. Indeed, it might be argued that the university has a foot in more than one camp. However, the thesis argues that despite the political connection of the university to the state referred to above, particularly between the leaders of higher education and government, that the academy still represents an independent cultural domain not only capable of transforming social conditions (symbolically) but that in ‘excellence’ it does this now in reality, representing the emancipatory cognitive interests of society and transforming it through participation in and access to knowledge. This is despite

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much prospect of the democratic reshaping from within of a different economic system by means of worker self-management, in other words switching its steering from money and organizational power *completely* over to participation’. And he goes on to describe how the problem today is self-organization ‘within autonomous public spheres and that the radical-democratic process of will-formation can come to have a decisive impact on media-steered sub systems in a life-world oriented toward use values, towards ends in general’. And moreover that, ... ‘this task involves holding the systemic imperatives of an interventionist state apparatus and those of an economic system in check, and is formulated in defensive terms. Yet, this defensive re-steering will not be able to succeed without a radical and broadly effective democratization’. So Habermas suggests that there is potential in the system of money of power; it has evolutionary value, although there will be no socialization of the relations of production but that democratization is possible in the autonomous public spheres, however in order for this to happen there must be democratization, e.g. the reorganisation of the access to relations of knowledge, which for example the thesis argues the university can achieve.

the restrictions of system imperatives. Fundamentally, and to reiterate, this thesis takes neoliberalism as the ideology intruding or impinging on the lifeworld of higher education and in fact this is in effect simply an imperative for economic growth, the mechanism driving capitalism forward (*ibid*) which contrary to the discussion immediately above is recognised as such in the ‘lifeworld’ of the university as this concept was defined and operationalized at the outset of this thesis and at the start of this section of writing. This thesis further argues that this imperative eclipses the emancipatory notion of excellence, and that this happens through the language and the argumentation style of the political administration and, the reciprocal utterances of the leaders of English higher education which emphasize economic growth over other human interests. This thesis argued in its introductory chapter that the attempt to implement a market indicative of neoliberalism and in the process the removal of the state from provision of the public good which is higher education had not been successful. It was also argued that this was because of the plural political and economic logics of our time – our system and society - which as suggested above bears a great deal of resemblance to the description given by Habermas in *Legitimation Crisis*<sup>96</sup>. This of course strongly presupposes that ‘ideology’<sup>97</sup> is not omnipotent and that there remains an independence of thought in society and, in our lifeworld, although this is subordinated to the economic imperative and that this can have a reifying effect on the life of the university. The colonization of the university is not an accomplished fact however, and thus this thesis applies the communicative model of Habermas, that is, the ideal speech situation and the lifeworld as concepts to explore

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<sup>96</sup> The Great recession was presented at the outset of the thesis to provide the economic context for the Coalition’s interventions in English higher education. The contemporary situation is the UK remains one of crisis and uncertainty as the effects of the recession continue (e.g. a crisis in living standards) and the demographic demands of education, health, and welfare provision continue to place historically unseen demands on a political system rocked by recent scandals and seemingly losing legitimacy as the face of British politics is changed by these and other challenges to the status quo. Not least for example, the challenge from the right in the guise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and debates calling for devolution in England following the referendum on independence in Scotland. And all this has to be viewed in a global political and economic context which seems evermore precarious. This is discussed again in the conclusion to the thesis when the current state of English higher education is summarised.

<sup>97</sup> Fairclough (2013: 13) states that the latest crisis of capitalism, that is of neoliberalism also represents the failure of the discourse of neoliberalism.



theoretically how excellence as the liberating principle of the English university might be communicated. Thus this thesis now leaves its specific discussion of Habermas and enters into a more expansive discussion on ideology and its centrality to critical and political discourse analysis whilst retaining the connection to his work and its centrality to contemporary critical social science. Firstly however, the methodological framework of Critical Theory is set out in order to fully explicate the theoretical perspective of this thesis.

### **Critical Theory, methodology and the production of knowledge**

The conceptual framework of the thesis as it has been presented thus far sets out the over-all methodological approach of this research project. To reiterate, the thesis firstly sets out the contemporary political context in which English higher education is now situated and takes the Hellenic interpretation of excellence defined as a utopian ideal and political imaginary as the counterfactual to the status quo and argues theoretically that this imaginary can be made real through the ideal speech act. This current section of writing will also discuss how the final methodological step of Critical Theory, the scientific-public validation of research can operationalize the ideal speech act in a discursive event. In chapter four the thesis will support its arguments with a socio-historical analysis of the development of the English university to support its fundamental premise that transformative excellence is a legitimating principle of English higher education and a subsidiary argument that it has been eclipsed by the demands of economic imperative, and oriented to this through language, communication, an argument that has been elucidated above through the theories and concepts of Habermas. This chapter is followed by a critical policy analysis (chapter five) which elucidates the discourses, social practices of English higher education. A central aspect of this thesis is the research material obtained through in-depth, semi-structured and conversation-led interviews which contain an auto-biographical narrative<sup>98</sup> which support

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<sup>98</sup> In an interview with Anders Petersen and Rasmus Willig (2002: 268), (cited in Strydom: 2011; 114) Honneth specifically discusses and replies to questions about his theory of 'recognition'. However, he also replies to a more general question from Willig enquiring about research methods for Critical Theory: 'Does social philosophy/critical theory not need methods of its own that could guide empirical sociologists; or does it rely on a wide spectrum of different methods? Honneth replied: 'That is a difficult question. We have a lot of discussions on that now in the Institute for Social

the central argument that excellence is the legitimating principle of the academy and the subsidiary argument that the expression of this is occluded by the political discourse of excellence and the intrusion of the economic imperative into the lifeworld of the university.

So the previous sections of writing in this chapter explicated the concept of excellence and implicitly set out the methodological framework in which it is conceptualised and operationalized in through the concept central to Critical Theory – immanent transcendence. The thesis is abductive, in that it imagines a new future, (the normative level moment) a transformed reality developed from the material conditions of a society in which individuals are affected by economic crisis, pathologies (the micro level moment), and, the structure, indeed the lifeworld of our public institutions is threatened (the macro-level moment). In short, the thesis takes its inspiration from the troubled times in our society which were precipitated by the Great Depression and, the radical changes made by the state to our public services, in particular, our universities, ostensibly on the basis of that economic crisis (Wright Mills: 1959). In this respect, Delanty states that:

Situations of major crisis – capitalist crisis or the wider conflict of system and lifeworld – give rise to social struggles. Habermas's critical theory directs empirical analysis to those sites of contestation where cognitive changes for a better world are likely to be codified. In essence, critique as a methodology for social science is addressed to a critical problem and seeks to explain the specific form normative or regulative ideas take as a result of competing positions and the identification of pathologies (Delanty: 2011: 73)

The thesis argues that a communicative action centred on the transformative concept of excellence, which is rooted in these material conditions and as has been argued, is inextricably linked to emancipatory human interests can affirm higher education as a transformative, liberating force in society. Habermas's epistemological and ontological

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Research. My own feeling is that we should rely on what you call a wide spectrum of different methods, so that there is no need to create a methodology of one's own. I think we can rely on some of the methods, which have been used in the Institute for Social Research before, in the traditional and classic studies. Honneth went on to say that empirical research mainly depends on a clear hypothesis of certain social developments, preferably certain social pathologies and that structured interviews and group discussions which are in the tradition of the institute for social research would be a good starting point. Strydom interprets this as meaning that this is a clever way of combining existing methods and that other qualitative methods such as biographical research and deep interviews incorporating sociological and psychoanalytical assumptions would be appropriate.

position is informed by a 'weak' or 'soft naturalism' and a pragmatic epistemic realism'. In underscoring the 'abductive inference' and defining Habermas's position Strydom states that pragmatic epistemic realism starts from:

the assumption of human engagement with the world through problems encountered as they arise from the objective context of life and disclose the relevant depth dimension of reality, about which it is necessary to develop knowledge and a corresponding action plan (Strydom: 2011: 110)

Thus Strydom (2011:135) defines immanent transcendence as: 'accumulated historical potential in the form of socio-practical ideas of reason or cultural models that reflection in the form of critical disclosure makes or could make apparent so that the potential is or could be realized to some degree through appropriate social practices'. Strydom (2011:136) also states that the function of reconstruction in Critical Theory's methodology, first, is to identify, recover and make explicit the structuring force of both pragmatic presuppositions and possibilities of the concrete situation and the formal or universal structures refracted as ideas of socio-practical reason and expressed in ethically relevant cultural models which are necessarily implied or presupposed by the social practices or forms of life in question'. In other words, the possibilities or transformative potential of the concrete situation needs to be identified within a framework of society in which presupposes the basis of a good life despite the distorting and or deforming effects of the current mode of reason on existent institutions. This is reconstruction; immanent reconstructive critique and transcendent reconstructive critique which presuppose a movement and mediation between the various stages of understanding or knowledge of social reality and its critique and transcendence<sup>99</sup>. However Strydom (2011: 143-146) also states that in the past Critical Theory has operated with only an implicit understanding and statement of the epistemology underpinning it and

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<sup>99</sup> Strydom (2011: 110-12) refers to Habermas's stated position on the scientific character of Critical Theory including the desirability of a theoretic approach able to produce objective and explanatory knowledge that can be employed for critical purposes. This is established through reconstruction. However, the critique of for example, social pathologies and distorted communication should be supported with an explanation of how this came about. To quote: 'a substantive example would be a historically informed sociological explanation in terms of 'the systemic imperatives of autonomous subsystems [which] penetrate into the lifeworld ... through monetarization and bureaucratization'. Strydom quoting Habermas from TCA (1984/70). Vols I-II. London: Heineman.

that now it would be beneficial for it to make an explicit statement of ‘three place-signed epistemology’ which is presupposed by the left-Hegelian tradition<sup>100</sup>. Earlier in his writing Strydom (2011: 110) states that ‘Critical Theory has been suffering from a weakness for years’ and that this is ‘an underspecified and underdeveloped methodological framework which is symptomatic of an inadequate connection to social reality’ thus this section of writing now discusses this, although in brief given the restrictions of space. Simply put, three place-signed epistemology’ developed from Pierce’s sign mediated epistemology, is how we understand the process of knowledge constitution and its production and the dynamic existing between them which is referred to as ‘the triadic sign relation or function’ which is as Strydom (2011: 143-4) states, a process of mediation, ‘according to which a sign signifies or refers to something for an interpreter’. Firstly, the sign has a material aspect, second, and importantly, it is real [it represents an objective reality], thirdly the sign user or interpreter ‘is not just an individual but a member of a community, a real communication community which stretches beyond the scientific community as well as [to] a temporally infinite unlimited or ideal communication community representing a regulative and hence also a critical principle’. The third process of mediation implies a responsibility to, and indeed a reciprocal communicative relationship with a validating public in a critical normative – ‘ideal’ - discursive community of the future. These are the epistemological aspects of sign mediated epistemology, the ontological dimensions are represented by the type of signs and three universal categories which Pierce called ‘firstness’, ‘secondness’ and ‘thirdness’, which correspond to the three moments of the abductive inference, are themselves represented by icons, indices and symbols through which the communication community, interpreter or sign user come to understand an object. ‘Icons capture the singular quality of reality felt and perceived, indices the dyadically confronted, experienced and identified object and symbols the ‘triadic representative interpretation which interrelates and

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<sup>100</sup> See Buchwalter (2012: 81-2) for a discussion on the philosophical origins of immanent transcendence and reconstruction.

brings these various moments into a consistent unity'. In stressing the importance of ontology to Critical Theory Strydom states that:

the quality of reality is of great importance to Critical Theory, as indicated by the central role assigned to suffering, moral indignation, resistance or conflict as qualitatively felt and perceived manifestations of the state of a society. It points towards the methodological priority critical theorists give to problems, challenges, threats, crises or pathologies. Such iconic significations provide Critical Theory with a starting point and a lead for a systemic investigation of its object domain by opening up the structure of reality (Strydom: 2011: 146)

Reality however, is a tension laden concept. Objective knowledge depends on 'reality', with 'on the one hand, reference to the objective actuality and the structures and generative mechanisms underlying it, and yet on the other it cannot be secured by reference to the objective world alone as its establishment requires a cooperative process of the search for truth, the public exchange of arguments. 'In the end, however, reality must nevertheless surpass discursive agreement in so far as it is something independent and transcendent and not reducible to agreement among the interlocutors' (Strydom: *ibid*). This represents the tension between structure and mechanism and agreement about it and a future imagined but, the possibility in that future of different views too. This constitutes the fallibility and conditionality in principle of scientific knowledge, 'including that of Critical Theory'. Thus Critical Theory proceeds through a three sign mediated epistemology. The empirical, actual and real dimensions are mediated moments in the semiotic process. Indeed, Strydom (2011: 145) states that because Critical Theory - reconstructive explanatory critique - refers to something in the objective world it is a requirement of the methodological process to state this. So the three methodological moments of Critical Theory are firstly, problem disclosure and constitution of the object, secondly, diagnostic reconstruction and explanatory critique and finally, scientific-practical (and public) validation. Thus in restating its aims and objectives according to the tenets of Critical Theory the methodological approach of this thesis is as follows. First with regard to problem disclosure and constitution of the object, the thesis identifies the eclipsing of excellence as a socio-historical process of rationalization (adherence to the economic imperative which has created cyclical crises thus social

pathologies) as the problem, in that this has prevented the full realization of human potential and the possibilities of the good life for all. Second, the thesis proposes the reimagining – the re-appropriation - of excellence as the Hellenic ideal through argument in an ideal speech situation as the utopian moment of liberation and argues this through its theoretical approach and, through empirical research of the historical and contemporary university; and through a critical and political discourse analysis. Finally, the thesis argues that scientific-practical (public) validation of critical research such as this on ‘excellence’ through systematic moral and ethical discourse in the scientific and public domains can construct an ideal speech situation for the articulation of excellence and the transformative ideal. Whilst discussing the world disclosing role of Critical Theory Delanty states that:

This link between critique and social praxis has been a key feature of much of the critical tradition in that social science is supposed to have a practical role in resolving social problems and in transforming the social world. While normative reconstruction at the second level is situation transcendent, disclosing critique’s role is more explicitly transcendent at the level of practice than any of the other ones, for it is through this role that social science connects with public discourse and social practice. Theory and practice, science and politics have ultimately complementary functions in that science provides democracy with self-reflection and critique based on research, while democracy opens up social science to public interests. (Delanty: 2011: 89-90)

This suggests the reciprocal communicative relationship between critical research and the public realm referred to above. This final methodological aspect of Critical Theory is returned to at the conclusion of this thesis when this study is argued for as an original contribution to the sociology of higher education. This section of writing has focused on the methodology of Critical Theory. The following section discusses the empirical research process of the thesis and explains how its methods connect with a Habermasian theory of communicative action and the re-appropriation of excellence.

### **Critical research and methods**

So with specific regard to research methods, this thesis underpins and informs its critical theoretical approach with empirical research into the English university using material taken from the research interviews discussed above. Strydom (2011: 8) in discussing the etymology of ‘methodology’ makes a distinction between the scientific

method, 'methodologism' and the goal directed nature of Critical Theory. He states that 'rather than methods, procedures and related techniques, therefore, the term refers to the systematicity of methods in a certain domain, the logic or theory governing methods for the purpose of knowledge and theory production. He goes on to say that 'there of course a wide range of quantitative or extensive, qualitative or intensive and critical methods from which Critical Theory could select for the purposes of critical social research and (quoting Adorno) that any such methods must be appropriate to the object of study'. However, in a caveat he goes on to state that this does not exclude the requirement that their selection and use be subject to more general methodological considerations beyond and above mere methods'. This is taken to mean that the selection of methods is as important as the methodological approach in Critical Theory and should in fact not just be appropriate to the object of study but have symmetry with the methodological approach (Howcroft and Trauth: 2005; 40-1). Delanty (2011:74) states that: 'Critique proceeds from a critical issue or crisis to an account of the normative ideas that are involved to an analysis of how social actors position themselves with respect to the problem. In this way, macro issues are translated into the micro level of analysis. While Habermas's use of the critical method in social research has been relatively limited, others have developed it in ways that connect more firmly macro-societal analysis with micro analysis of specific communicative situations'. Examples of this research include the application of the broad range of theories and concepts from Habermas's TCA which position the researcher in different ways to the object of research and also operate with different definitions of 'discourse'. Therefore the purpose of the following sections, and using some of these examples is to elucidate the approach and definitions used in this study and to set out the position of researcher in relation to its research and participants and, vice-versa.

Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al.* (1999: 2000) who are International Systems (ISS) researchers conducted critical research at Sygma University in Australia employing theories and concepts from Habermas's TCA. The object of the research was the consultative restructuring process run through an Organizational Support System (OSS) which entailed

the construction of a virtual reality or social space by the president of the university through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). This essentially entailed open emails available on the university intranet. This allowed the consultation process to be a publicly mediated and participative and thus ostensibly democratic process incorporating the views of the staff. Without venturing too deeply into the research findings Cecez-Kecmanovic found that these views, including criticism of the restructuring process were ignored by the president. Suffice it so say, the process turned out to be undemocratic. In fact, 'it enabled distorted communication' (Cecez-Kecmanovic: 2000; 151). As part of the research process Cecez-Kecmanovic and her colleagues conducted and interpreted 50 interviews as well as engaging in participant observation and face-to-face meetings and so adopted a critical ethnographic method. In discussing the relationship between theory and methodological strategies Cecez-Kecmanovic (2000: 152) reflects on the use of Habermas's TCA. Essentially this is the interpretative analysis of linguistic (speech) acts and social actions in CMC discourse, the interpretation of the relationship between social interaction, system integration and social integration. In interpreting Habermas in the organizational context, the University can be seen in Cecez-Kecmanovic's research as simultaneously representing the 'system' and, the 'lifeworld' of its members as she in fact states herself (Cecez-Kecmanovic's: 2000;155). The system aspect relates to state and strategic or instrumental imperatives, that is, purposive rationality, and the lifeworld is 'the symbolically recreated taken-for-granted universe of daily social activities of members' (Cecez-Kecmanovic: 2000; 155). This led Cecez-Kecmanovic and her colleagues to conceptualizing the lifeworld in this particular university as the realm of communicative action and shared social practices, and the administration of the university, personified by the president as representing the system and the centre from which strategic actions are masked – 'concealed' - in the form of communicative rationality (Cecez-Kecmanovic:2000; 156). As discussed earlier in this chapter, this thesis does not conceptualize the academy as two distinct, separate domains, although it acknowledges that it could indeed be seen as this, as well indeed, as an expert culture, separated from society through a specialization in language. The research interview material used to support the



thesis is taken 28 interviews with vice-chancellors and academics although the former are in the majority. However, the thesis does not make a cut and dried distinction between academics and administrators, arguing that not only is the relationship between state and higher education much more complex and nuanced than the one Cecez-Kecmanovic's research would suggest, but the fact that these administrators were and are all academics engaged in their fields and in some cases, higher education itself makes the idea of them being in one camp or another difficult to sustain. Thus the totality of the university is conceptualized as 'lifeworld' in the thesis whilst it is acknowledged by virtue of the argument presented above that the economic imperative has made incursions into the lifeworld. Indeed, the thesis accepts that the university reflects society in that its interests are a mix of the instrumental – strategic – as well as the practical and emancipatory and so it is accepted that is a functional institution in that it reproduces society, however it is argued here that it also recreates society. The thesis does critically analyse the political discourse of excellence in the course of a critical and political discourse analysis (discussed below shortly), and as such, identifies adherence to the economic imperative in documentary sources, political communications and in political arguments in these sources but, it does not directly seek to identify strategic imperatives per se in interview material, that is, the text obtained from the participants. Instead, it interprets, critically analyses and then explains the responses of research participants who were asked directly in in-depth, semi-structured conversation-led interviews about the interests and purpose of the university and, its relationship to power – the state and how this affected its lifeworld. Thus the thesis gives an account of how academics and leaders as 'social actors position themselves with respect to the problem' (*ibid*), that is, how they orient themselves in the lifeworld to the radical changes implemented in higher education by the Coalition in times of economic and, social crisis. So the thesis makes an institutional contextual interpretation and analysis from the research questions asked in the context of the current domestic political climate. Moreover, the research the participants were asked to give their responses in the context of interviews which asked them to reflect openly but in anonymity about their own histories in higher

education to enable a reflection on what if anything had changed in the university<sup>101</sup>. Thus the thesis avoids to an extent the critical hermeneutic method employed by Cecez-Kecmanovic and her colleagues in the analysis of her interviews but accepts that in the purest and simplest definition of ‘hermeneutics’ the analysis made is but an interpretation of the informant’s own understanding and explanation of the question and their own reflective process and meaning making. The thesis also acknowledges that the interpretation and analysis made is a reflection of the role of the researcher (and indeed participant) in the construction of reality and as the constructor of knowledge (Trainor: 2012; 130), reflects the role of the power relationship in the research dynamic (Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Packer<sup>102</sup>: 2011; 47-9; Seidman: 2012: 101), and is arrived at from certain sociological assumptions about higher education which are, as discussed here, emancipatory in foundation and as such reflect the ideological position of the researcher.<sup>103</sup> Galtung (1977: 40) states that: ‘To work with methodology... is a political act...the choice of methodology is implicitly the choice of an ideology, including the mystifying, monotheistic ideology that there is but one methodology – the universal one [presumably Galtung is referring to positivism here]. To the extent that we are conscious the choice is for us to make, not to be made for us, and to the extent that we are *free* for us to enact’ (*sic*) (*original emphasis*). Indeed, and with regard to the issue of the researcher’s own political position and quoting Morrow and Brown (1994: 228), Cecez-Kecmanovic (2000: 146) states that “my experience confirms that ‘a defining method of critical research methodology is that choices about

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<sup>101</sup> Bohman (1999: 474) in discussing critical social inquiry states that: ‘...addresses the subjects of inquiry as equal reflective participants, as knowledgeable *social agents*. In this way, the asymmetries of the context of technical control are suspended; this means that critical social inquiry must be judged by a different set of practical consequences, appealing to increasing the “reflective knowledge” that agents already possess to a greater or lesser degree. As themselves agents in the social world, social scientists participate in the creation of the sort of contexts in which their theories are publicly verified’ (*emphasis added*). However, Seidman (2012: 13) states that the choice of term for research interviewees is important as different terms imply different relationships between the researcher and the interviewer. For example, the term participants used in this thesis, as Seidman states, reflects the idea that in-depth interviewing of people encourages them to reconstruct their own experience actively within the context of their lives. He goes on to say that the word participant seems to capture both the sense of active involvement that occurs in an in-depth interview and the sense of equity that we try and build in interviews. Thus the thesis uses ‘participants’.

<sup>102</sup> In fact in Packer (2011) it is argued that the research relationship is asymmetric and unfairly favours the interviewer.

<sup>103</sup> Galtung sourced originally from Howarth and Trauth (2005).

linking theories and methods are an ongoing process that is contextually bound, not a technical decision that can be taken for granted through reference to the ‘logic of science’’. Cecez-Kecmanovic goes on to say that the critical tradition is characterized by reflexivity, involving forms of self-conscious criticism as part of the strategy to conduct critical empirical research. ‘Researchers explore their own ontological and epistemological assumptions and preferences that inform their research and influence their engagement with a study’ (Cecez-Kecmanovic: 2000; 146). Thus it follows from this that the researcher should make explicit their intentions and critical orientation to participants as part of the critical research process and be aware that their own identity as a member of the lifeworld may influence and prejudice their research strategy, and moreover, the interpretation of research material. ‘Choosing a Habermasian approach goes beyond an objective analysis of discourses and requires the researcher to understand him or herself as part of an ongoing discourse and ... . They are required to be critical and emancipatory, to participate in discourses and to be open to discussion. They should realise the ethical implications of their research and act on them (Carsten Stahl: 2004; 4333). Indeed, the philosophical orientation of the critical research for this thesis was fuelled initially by the assumption of an ontological distinction between lifeworld, the academy and the centre or administration of the English university and indeed, the state, however the research process, of which participants were made implicitly and explicitly aware before the interview process, changed this view as the implications of the research revealed the university to a great extent to be an institution of communicative rationality – excellence - and one which presupposes the potential of the ideal speech situation. In many ways this thesis is a defence of the university then (Lucas: 2006; 4)<sup>104</sup>

The thesis represents a methodological pluralism in that it combines research on the micro level with participants in the university and a political and critical discourse analysis of documents, text which connects higher education to state policy on the meso level, with a

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<sup>104</sup> Lucas (2006:4) states, it is important to be transparent and ‘maintain a critical vigilance of how [one’s own] values and assumptions, values and ideals may influence the research process’:

macro level critical socio-historical analysis and discourse analysis of the development of the English university and its relationship with the state through a critical discourse analysis of political policy through the course of the last century to the present day. Thus the thesis critically examines English higher education and the changes made to it in the ebbs and flows of capitalism and, British government policy. The following section explains how critical and political discourse analysis is applied to this task and discusses the theoretical pluralism employed in this aspect of the thesis to achieve this goal (Bohman<sup>105</sup>: 1999; Delanty:<sup>106</sup> 2011).

### **Discourse and ideology critique**

This section focuses on critical and political discourse analysis and follows Fairclough in this approach (Fairclough, a: 2013). Before explaining this approach and its relevance and application to this thesis the term ‘discourse’ is discussed as its meaning is often generalised and is taken to mean different things by different traditions within the school of CDA and in critical sociology and, to dictate research methodology. Therefore, the immediate purpose of this representation is to elucidate the methodological approach of the thesis, the definition of discourse as it is meant in the thesis follows below. Benhabib (1985) in discussing Habermas’s development of practical argument describes discourse thus:

Arguments dealing with theoretical truth claims, with statements about what the case is, or with practical assertions, with statements about what ought to be done, are named "discourses." Discourses are described as special argumentation procedures in which both facts about what is the case and norms about what is right are challenged and no longer taken for granted. In discourses we "suspend belief" in the truth of propositions and the validity of normative claims that we ordinarily take for granted in our everyday transactions. (Benhabib: 1985; 86).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See Bohman (1999) who argues through Dewey’s pragmatism that a thorough going methodological and theoretical pluralism strengthens the political as well as the social scientific aims of critical social science.

<sup>106</sup> See Delanty (2011) who argues that to strengthen critical theory and to underpin the macro level critique of society, which he argues the cultural turn has diminished, the incorporation of the different traditions of critical sociology is necessary.

<sup>107</sup> Benhabib takes quotations from Habermas, "Introduction to the New Edition," *Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 25. English translation by John Viertel, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

This theory of argumentation and discourse is of course developed and discussed in the context of the ideal speech situation. 'The aim of discourses is to generate a "rationally motivated consensus" on controversial claims' (Benhabib: 1985; 85). Carsten Stahl (2004) gives the following definition and thus provides an etymology of the word 'discourse' whilst making a comparison of the Foucauldian and Habermasian concepts of discourse in International Systems research.

The Latin root of the term is the verb *discurrere*, which means literally "to run apart", from *currere*, "to run". *Diskursus* thus means "to run to and fro" (cf. Encarta 1999, 538), which has developed into the idea of an exchange of ideas. The English, French, and German use of the term differ slightly. The French *le discours* is slightly less formal than the English discourse. While it still refers to serious statements, it is more part of the ordinary use of language. *Donner un discours*, for example, means to give a speech or presentation. Discourse therefore does not necessarily refer to an immediate exchange of ideas. On the other hand there is the German term *Diskurs*, as used by Habermas is probably even more formal in its use than the English term. The use of *Diskurs* in German stands for a clearly defined debate about a specific topic. What we should keep in mind is that Foucault's *le discours* and Habermas's *der Diskurs* are not identical. (Carsten Stahl: 2004; 4329)

Carsten Stahl goes on to discuss the obvious differences between Foucault and Habermas with regard to their understanding of modernity and rationality and how researchers following these different traditions would apply these understandings to their research. With specific regard to Habermas he states 'In contrast to a Foucauldian researcher who is interested in the structure and genealogy of discourses, a Habermasian researcher would concentrate on their validity and adherence to the procedures implied in the ideal speech situation' (Carsten Stahl: 2004; 4333). In fact, and as was discussed above in the case of Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2000) own IS research, Habermasian researchers do not necessarily look explicitly for elements of the ideal speech situation, although the ostensibly participatory computer mediated communication aspect of her study might pre-suppose this, rather, her research incorporated a critical hermeneutic approach to interviews and group discussions, and applied Habermas's concept of strategic action directly to the critical analysis and interpretation of email communiques to illustrate the thesis of 'systematically distorted communication'. This thesis does not attempt this direct transfer of Habermas's

theories and concepts at the micro level but instead takes the ideal speech situation as the emancipatory goal of higher education in realising excellence which can be achieved through scientific and public discussion and validation. The thesis places this emancipatory aspect of its project and the argument that excellence as the Hellenic ideal is a legitimating principle of English higher education in an ideology critique of the global race. Through this approach the thesis does follow Habermas in that it critiques the strategic and instrumental language and thus objectives of the state which privilege technical over practical and emancipatory interests in the context of a society conceptualised for analytical purposes as system and lifeworld, a system which is ideological in the sense that it seeks legitimation (Chiapello and Fairclough: 2013; 257). Before defining discourse as it is meant in this thesis and explicating the process of analysis, and, the way that CDA is connected to this thesis, its theoretical, and indeed, political perspective, its emancipatory goal is made clear. Fairclough (2013a: 11) states that CDA is a form of critical research which seeks to understand how contemporary capitalism in some respects enables but in other respects prevents and limits human well-being and flourishing. He focuses much of his critical research on the development of 'new capitalism' or 'neoliberalism' which is defined below in due course. His current concern is the economic crisis which came to the sharp focus of the world with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 and which brought the banking and credit system close to collapse. In the UK following economic crisis, 'the Great Recession' has seen austerity measures implemented by the Coalition government which are argued to be unfair and to have brought hard times to some of those already most disadvantaged in society (Browne and Elming: 2015; Clark and Heath: 2014; Agostini, Hills and Sutherland; 2014; Lupton and Burchardt *et al.* : 2015<sup>108</sup> ). This is the context in which this thesis argues for higher education and, for a transformational excellence. Fairclough (2013a: 14) argues that in these times CDA should make a contribution to the financial and economic crisis. In setting out a 'manifesto' for CDA which he acknowledges is inherently political, he argues

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<sup>108</sup> See Social Policy in Cold Climate report: *The Coalition's Social Policy Record: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 2010-2015* led by John Hills at the LSE and researchers at the University of Manchester.

that there should be a shift in the priority of critical research, including CDA and this shift should move away from the critique of structures to the critique of strategies in an attempt to transform those structures. Moreover, that the critique should not just be descriptive but explanatory in that it moves from negative to positive critique and seeks possibilities for the transformation of social conditions which will advance human well-being. This can be said to be the reconstructive aspect of political discourse analysis then, because as Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 80) state, CDA on its own is explanatory. Thus and in symmetry with the reconstructive explanatory methodological framework of Critical Theory, the addition of argumentation and political theory adds the normative dimension and political discourse the reconstructive and transcendent moments. Indeed, Fairclough (2013a : 14) asks the question ‘if critical research is ‘knowledge-for-action’, how does the purpose of advancing knowledge connect with the purpose of supporting action for a better world’? Fairclough, emphasising the importance of argumentation in contemporary CDA and PDA, goes on to state that:

CDA has an important role in critical research focused on strategies because strategies have a strongly discursive character: they include imaginaries for change and for new practices and systems, and they include discourses narratives and arguments which interpret explain and justify the area of social life they are focused upon – its past, its present, and its possible future. These discursive features of strategies are crucial in assessing and establishing both their practical and adequacy to the state we are in and the world as it is and their feasibility, and their desirability with respect of particular ideas of human well-being. Fairclough (2013a: 18).

Fairclough states that critical analysis of discourse is a necessary part any of social analysis but what is the difference between critical analysis and critical discourse analysis? A short discussion on the differences and indeed, similarity between these two modes of critique will facilitate the development of an answer to this question and help to define ‘discourse’. After discussing the focus of CDA on the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs and in particular on discursive aspects of power, which includes a focus on ideology, ‘understanding ideology to be in the service of power’<sup>109</sup> and ways of representing

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<sup>109</sup> See Thompson (1984) and *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*.

the aspects of the world etc., Fairclough (2013a: 8) points out that ideologies are ‘open to critique on the grounds that they represent or explain aspects of the world inadequately’. In doing so, he states that there is another way of answering the question: what is critique? He says that ‘with radical implications for CDA it identifies critique of discourse as *any* application of critical method in social research’. Thus in going on to discuss critical analysis now, Fairclough (2013a: 8) states that this method of critique aims to produce interpretations and explanations of areas of social life which identify the causes of social wrongs and produce knowledge with a view to righting them or mitigating them. He goes on to say that interpretations and explanations already exist and that these come from lay people as well as those who seek to govern and regulate us and from social researchers, historians and philosophers etc. Interpretations and explanations can have effects upon us and can transform us, and a critique of some area of social life must be a critique of interpretations and explanations of social life, thus in some part, at least, interpretations and explanations are a ‘critique of discourse’ (Fairclough: 2013a: 8). So in the original sense of discourse, as set out through Carsten Stahl (2004) above, critical discourse analysis in its purest sense is discursive, it runs back and forth across existing interpretations and explanations in a philosophical discussion of ideas across space and time, and in doing so, it transforms them in a critique into new knowledge which has the potential for a transformation of social conditions. Thus in this sense the thesis does this when it provides new interpretations and explanations of the social, especially with regard to its critique of the socio-historical development of the English university in the next chapter and, in the critical policy chapter following this. However, the thesis also applies the principles of critical and political discourse of analysis to these chapters in that it critically analyses the language of the state, which it is argued, construe aspects of the world in an ideological way. For example, through the meaning making of terms such as ‘global race’ and through the ‘political discourse of excellence’ and the ‘knowledge economy’ which the thesis argues signify the ideology of the economic imperative.



Fairclough (2013b: 230) states that *discourse* (as a countable noun) is commonly used in various senses: (a) meaning making as an element of the social process, (b) the language associated with a particular field or social practice (e.g., ‘political discourse’) (c) and ways of construing aspects of the social world associated with a particular perspective (e.g., ‘a neo-liberal discourse of globalisation’). As it is easy to confuse them, Fairclough defines semiosis as meaning making which has the advantage of suggesting that discourse analysis is concerned with various ‘semiotic modalities’ of which language is only one’. And, that ‘*semiosis* is viewed as only one element of the social process which is dialectically related to others hence a ‘dialectical-relational’ approach’. ‘The relationship between elements, actors, languages, texts, social relations, and practical contexts is one of dialectical internal relations’. Taken from Bourdieu, this relation represents a connection between the different *habitus* (deportment of social actors developed through habitat) and the social *field* of social actors (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer: 2013; 208) Relations between elements are dialectical in the sense of being different but not ‘discreet’, i.e., not fully separate’. Fairclough (2013b: 230). ‘*Genre*’ refers to semiotic ways of acting or interacting, for example job and TV interviews, news reports, advertisements and within that there are different ‘*styles*’. *Discourses* can refer to semiotic ways of construing the world then and can be identified with different positions and perspectives. *Styles* are identities, ways of being, for example being an academic, a vice-chancellor or a prime minister. Thus in illustrating *semiosis*, *genre* and *style* a vice-chancellor or a professor for example, might behave and or perform, presenting his or her identity in a research interview, the prime minister will act in a certain way at the despatch box during prime minister’s question time and this is described as a semiotic *event* as is a lecture in a university. (Fairlough, Jessop and Sayer: 2013; 208). ‘*Orders of discourse*’ (Fairclough: 2013b; 230) refers to the semiotic dimension of social practices, the semiotic dimension of *events* are *texts*. Texts convey the meaning of events then, and are often recorded as written documentary sources, recorded on film and so visual and audio or are sound alone. *An order of discourse* is a social structuring of semiotic difference, a particular ordering of relationships between different ways of meaning-making

– different genres, discourses and styles. For example, the network of social practices which constitutes the field of [higher] education or university is constituted semiotically as ‘*order of discourse*’ (Fairclough: 2013b: 232-3). *Interdiscursivity* refers then to the combination of genres and discourses in a text (Titscher and Jenner: 2000; 150). Thus in asking what a ‘discourse’ is Fairclough (2013a: 3) states that ‘it is not some sort of entity or ‘object’, but is itself a complex set of relations including relations of communication between people who talk, write and in other ways communicate with each other, but also, for example, describe relations between concrete communicative events (conversations, newspaper articles etc.) and more abstract and enduring discursive ‘objects’ (with their own complex relations) like languages, discourses and genres. In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* Fairclough (2013) sets out his dialectical-relational approach for a macro analysis of society. This method involves the identification of an object and topic for study and the selection of a semiotic point of entry into this study. The study is then operationalised through the application of a concept of power and a theoretical perspective appropriate to this. In Fairclough’s case this is Gramsci and *hegemony*. Fairclough advises that it also appropriate to choose an economic theory of society as part of this methodological framework through which to explain the disparities of the social world. This is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, because the focus of the study is political it follows Fairclough in a political discourse analysis, which as argued in the introductory chapter enhances critical discourse analysis through its critique of the political imaginary (life under neoliberalism) and its pursuit of a new imaginary for society (Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012; 10-12) Fairclough (2013c: 380) argues that the analysis of language (or discourse analysis) can substantially enhance political analysis. Thus in following Fairclough, the thesis conducts a political discourse analysis of the language of the contemporary political administration, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government. Fairclough (2013,d) states that ‘discourse’ is used an abstract noun, for language and other semiotic modes seen as an element of social events and, ‘more abstractly’ (*emphasis added*), social practices, which is dialectically linked to other

elements, for example, social activity, social relations and institutional forms. This includes 'people, with knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and values and so elements of the material world'. These elements are different but not discreet in that they internalise other elements of the *discourse* in the social world. At the level of social practice however, discourse in the abstract sense is a concrete noun and signals the representation of the diverse elements of 'discourse' including genres, styles and language communicated in all its various ways. In his study of the language of New Labour Fairclough (2000) operated from a methodological framework which he sees as facilitating CDA's research agenda of focusing on how discourses figure in new capitalism or neoliberalism and globalization and how these connect to the discourses of 'the knowledge' or 'information' society and the relationship of these to social change. Methodologically, this research agenda analyses text and talk interdiscursively, that is how different genres, discourses and styles are drawn together. And, how these articulations are realised in the meanings of texts (Fairclough: 2013c; 380-1). In his study on New Labour, Fairclough delineates a social practice in its discourse aspect. This is 'an order of discourse' which as Fairclough (2013c: 382) states is an articulation of discourses, genres and styles. Thus orders of discourse constitute the regulation of linguistic and semiotic difference and regulation. This order of discourse is properly known as the politico-governmental order of discourse, including the diversity of positions within that, that is, with regard to Fairclough's study, within the Labour party and indeed, other political parties. Fairclough (2013c: 382) states that 'the language of New Labour includes political discourses (representations and imaginaries of diverse field and domains of social life which are subjected to government as well as government itself)'. In discussing the political discourse of the 'Third Way', Fairclough (2013c; 383) points out that discourses can be differentiated on different levels of generality or abstraction. That is to say, the Third Way, as a new and emerging political philosophy represented for example, as a political imaginary of what social life is, and how it should be managed and governed etc., that is, a new vision of society and indeed, this is expressed in the instance of the Third Way as a new form of democratic governance transcending the old and polarised class divisions of the past. As an

emerging and political discourse it was constantly changing, indeed, as well as the deep philosophical commitments within it, the discourse of the Third Way represented the policy initiatives and the direction of New Labour which were subject to different representations and, change according to the evolutionary development of the vision.

### **The global race and the political discourse of excellence**

Thus in following Fairclough and utilizing argumentation theory in a political discourse analysis, the thesis focuses on the discourse of ‘the global race’ and on ‘the political discourse of excellence’. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the notion of the global race, which was introduced by David Cameron, prime minister and leader of the Coalition, refers to the idea that as a nation and because of the Great Depression we are engaged in an international struggle in a battle for survival and that in order to win this battle the utilization of the university is imperative in the development of skills for a successful ‘knowledge society’. The rationale for this is that we live in an era of ‘globalization’ which demands maximum economic competition. Because higher education is the driver of a successful national economy it is also the instrument with which to achieve this victory (IPPR: 2014). A successful national economy is also argued to be the ideal environment in which individual aspiration can flourish and indeed, universities are the institution which can facilitate this through the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ (skills and credentials for the labour market) and help create a successful and fulfilled life for individuals (BIS,a: 2013; 4). Thus this can said to be the construction or ‘artefact’, that is, the political and social imaginary of the Coalition. Thus in a high level of abstraction, the discourse of the global race connects aspects of the social to government to the global economy, the knowledge society and to new capitalism or neoliberalism. This discourse can also be said to represent the political discourse of the Coalition in a time of crisis and uncertainty. Thus the semiotic point of entry for this research project is the discourse of the ‘global race’. The object of research is higher education and the topic the meaning of excellence in the crisis of the current economic order. As also discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the philosophical position of the Coalition is crucial in understanding policy on higher education as are its internal political

differences. Similarly, the political discourse of excellence connects the university through competition and competitiveness in research and teaching ‘excellence’ through performance rankings (Hazelkorn: 2011; 497) to what this thesis refers to as ‘competitive economic society’, in other words to new capitalism and or neoliberalism. The political discourse of excellence represents a view of higher education, which this thesis argues, privileges the economic imperative over human development and flourishing and the idea that as human society we are capable of developing, learning through a transformative excellence, a notion which privileges the development of people over the development of the economy (Nussbaum: 2010). To conduct the political discourse analysis the thesis uses documentary sources focusing on higher education, for example, strategic plans, government reports. Moreover, in making this critical analysis of higher education in the contemporary political context, the thesis takes text from HEFCE and policy documents and literature from HE specializing in political policy. In critiquing the Coalition and the stance of the government on the economy and with a focus on austerity, it uses limited sources from the print media (Fairclough and Fairclough: 2012).

Fairclough and Graham (2013:301) argue that language and discursive artefacts (for instance imagery) are of greater importance to new capitalism than to any other of its predecessors. For example and with regard to the notion of the ‘knowledge based’ economy and the idea that society is ‘knowledge-based’ in this sense, Fairclough and Graham (2013:302) state that this entails a discourse-based society which predicates itself on the production, exchange and consumption of knowledge, in other words, knowledge becomes a crucial commodity. Moreover, the cycle of knowledge production, exchange and consumption includes ‘operationalization’. That is, on the one hand knowledges (‘discourses’) as social practices, as ways of acting and interacting; and on the other, the ‘inculcation’ of knowledges (discourses) as ways of knowing one’s self in the world, as ways of being, as identities’. This implies that differential access to and acquisition of knowledges would produce social pathologies. Enactment involves the creation of new genres, that is, new ways of acting, representing meaning and this is achieved through ‘generic chaining’ and

‘genetic convergence’. This simply refers to the way in which practices are chained, that is the regular sequential chaining of practices, genres. For example, this could be the prepared media strategy of government implying a chain structure punctuated by media-oriented practices which delivers a political message in a systematic and coherent fashion<sup>110</sup>. Fairclough and Graham go on to say: ‘The diffusion, operationalization, enactment and inculcation of discourses are crucial in the integration of different scales of economic activity. If the socio-economic order is discourse - and language based in this sense – and we must assume it is – understanding of it, resistance to it, and struggle against it must also incorporate a significant discursive element’. This implies a resistance through communication and language to an ‘ideology’ which maintains itself through language. Thus in concluding this chapter a discussion is presented next which is designed to sum up the objectives of this thesis and in doing so it will focus on the ‘discursive element’ of the argument. In doing so, it will also discuss ideology. That is, it will discuss the ideological position of this thesis with respect of resistance to ‘neoliberalism’. It will also therefore, attempt to define neoliberalism and indeed, in doing so it will offer a definition of ‘ideology’<sup>111</sup> and discuss its centrality in this thesis.

Chiapello and Fairclough define ideology thus:

An ideology is a system of ideas, values and beliefs oriented to explaining a given political order, legitimising existing hierarchies of power relations and preserving group identities. Ideology explains both the horizontal structure (the division of labour) of a society and its vertical structure (the separation of rulers and ruled), producing ideas which legitimise the latter, explaining in particular why one group is dominant and another dominated, one why person (*sic*) gives orders in a particular enterprise while another takes orders. Ideology is thus closely linked to Weber’s concept of legitimacy, for according to Weber domination and compliance require the belief of the dominated in the legitimacy of the dominant. Ideology is one of the central vectors of this legitimacy, even though Weber lacked a concept of ideology Chiapello and Fairclough (2013: 257).

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<sup>110</sup> Taken from undated on-line paper of Fairclough, University of Lancaster called: *Discourse, social theory, and social research: the discourse of welfare reform*.

<sup>111</sup> See Fairclough and Graham (2013: 311-2) for a discussion on the origins of ideology as initially conceived of by Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) as an all-encompassing discipline to replace theology to its critique in Marx’s *The German Ideology*.

In a way this extract succinctly sums up Habermas's thesis in *Legitimation Crisis*, that is to say it explains how government, the state requires the support, indeed, the belief of the public to maintain legitimacy. As this thesis has argued, the current situation in the UK and elsewhere in the world bears an uncanny resemblance to the idea that governments and capitalism have lost their legitimacy since the start of the Great Recession. Indeed, Fairclough (*ibid*) has suggested that the current form of capitalism – new capitalism – or neoliberalism may be on the wane. Moreover, Habermas (2009: 228) states in this context that: '... my hope is that the neoliberal agenda will no longer be accepted at face value but will be suspended. The whole program of subordinating the lifeworld to the imperatives of the market must be subjected to scrutiny'. Indeed, the latest global crisis has given rise to a considerable number of new works critiquing capitalism and its failings, for example, Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty First Century* (2014), Danny Dorling's *Inequality and the 1%* (2014b) and Andrew Gamble's *Crisis Without End?: The Unravelling of Western Prosperity* (2014) to name but a few. But what is the latest stage of capitalism – new capitalism or neoliberalism really all about? That is to say, how does it differ from previous stages of capitalism and how can we define it?

At the start of this thesis this definition of neoliberalism was given: a belief in liberal economics: the efficiency of the free market, competition and competitiveness and thus a belief that the market has primacy of place over the state, that is to say, it is an economic critique of the state, which paradoxically, legitimates, empowers and expands the state (Davies: 2014). Harvey (2005: 2) gives a more explicit and indeed, deliberate role to the state defining Neoliberalism as 'a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices'. Gane (2012) defines it as 'a political economy which furthers the reach of capitalism by injecting market dynamics and in particular, principles of competition, into the basic fabric of social life and culture'. Davies

(2014b) states that definitions of neoliberalism vary across the literature and defines its common features thus:

Victorian liberalism is viewed as an inspiration for neoliberalism, but not a model. Neoliberalism is an inventive, constructivist, modernizing force, which aims to produce a new social and political model, and not to recover an old one. Neoliberalism is not a conservative or nostalgic project.

Following this, neoliberal policy targets institutions and activities which lie outside of the market, such as universities, households, public administrations and trade unions. This may be so as to bring them inside the market, through acts of privatization; or to reinvent them in a 'market-like' way; or simply to neutralize or disband them.

To do this, the state must be an active force, and cannot simply rely on 'market forces'. This is where the distinction from Victorian liberalism is greatest. Neoliberal states are required to produce and reproduce the rules of institutions and individual conduct, in ways that accord with a certain ethical and political vision.

This ethical and political vision is dominated by an idea of competitive activity, that is, the production of inequality. Competition and inequality are valued positively under neoliberalism<sup>112</sup>, as a non-socialist principle for society in general, through which value and scientific knowledge can best be pursued (Davies: 2014)

So it is possible to conclude from these definitions that neoliberalism privileges the freedom of the individual, to achieve and succeed in life or not, and that this is determined by the free market and the free competition of the market place and this will facilitate human flourishing and crucially, growth<sup>113</sup>. Moreover, that neoliberalism seeks to inculcate this ethical and political vision through the rules of institutions and the conducts of individuals, in other words, through the 'enactment' (Fairclough: *ibid*) of the discourse of neoliberalism.

The state has an ambiguous role in maintaining this state of affairs, then, and as can be seen

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<sup>112</sup> See Dorling (2014b: 43-4) where the director of the IPPR is quoted as saying that market inequalities are necessary for economic efficiency and freedom of choice.

<sup>113</sup> See working paper by Cingano, F. (2014), for the OECD *Trends in Income Inequality and its Impact on Economic Growth* which suggests that over the last 30 years, and since the rise of neoliberal practices, inequality in society has increased, while economic growth has been damaged. He argues that to redress this, active policies to redistribute wealth (via taxes for example) and crucially, the enabling of the participation of the young from disadvantaged groups in education and the labour market, is key to promoting and increasing growth.

See also Habermas (2009: 229) who refers to the Washington Consensus, the economic plan devised by the IMF and World Bank which is often considered to be a political and economic manifesto for the global implementation of neoliberalism. Habermas argues here that the philosophy underpinning the Washington Consensus referred to as 'Trickle Down: let the rich become richer and affluence will trickle down to the poor' to have been proved empirically to be fundamentally flawed, indeed, he argues that empirical evidence proves it to be a 'falsehood'.



through Davies's definition, neoliberalism, as well as disbanding some institutions attempts to bring others which lie outside it into the market, including higher education. However, at the outset of this thesis a project to shrink the state was discussed. It was argued there through Gamble (*ibid: introduction*) and others that the recession gave the pretext for the continuation of a Conservative project to shrink the state and that this project had begun under Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Moreover, it is argued that this project represents the destruction of the Keynesian post-war consensus in Britain. This suggests that this incarnation of neoliberalism may be specific to the UK and thus different to the compromise between state managed social market economy found in European 'ordoliberalism' and to American neoliberalism. In order to understand this project it is first necessary to understand from where neoliberalism derives, that is, to understand its historical and philosophical origins.

Fairlough (2013a: 13) states that neoliberalism began as a liberal 'counter revolution' against broadly social-democratic and 'statist' forms of capitalism and that this had long been prepared and imagined by Freidrich Hayek, Milton Freedman and their followers and that this took place in universities (the Chicago School for example) and right-wing think tanks (The Mont Pelerin Society). Davies (2014; 2014b) describes how neoliberalism began as a response to the increasing collectivist liberal state which began in 1870 following the movement from classical liberalism, that is laissez faire capitalism – 'let do' or in today's parlance 'let the market decide', to a more social democratic model of society. In Britain, the movement from this mode of capitalism to the development of a state run bureaucracy, economy and the development of a welfare state can be said to have really have begun under the Liberal social reforms of 1906-1914 which based themselves on a German model of social insurance. Thus liberalism was moving towards a social democratic model of society which was seen as regressive, not a progressive move by the advocates of neoliberalism. Davies states:

The origins of neoliberalism can be traced back to the years preceding the Great Depression, and to the writings of Ludwig von Mises criticising the rationality of socialism. This work, which catalyzed the 'socialist calculation debate' of

the 1920s and '30s, and to which Friedrich von Hayek was also a contributor, involved a renewal of the case for economic liberalism. Liberalism as exemplified by Victorian laissez-faire was perceived to have peaked around 1870, but been in decline ever since, with the rise of corporations, trade unions, social policies, regulation and state socialism. The task faced by Mises, Hayek and those that supported them was to re-imagine economic liberalism in ways that either accommodated these new developments or could effectively rebuff them (Davies: 2014b).

The Great Depression of the 1930s was ushered in the New Deal in America, a keynesianism state intervention, not long after, fascism and the Second World War took hold in Europe and the pioneers of neoliberalism felt themselves facing a world of 'totalitarianism' on the left and right, from Soviet Communism and the Nationalist Socialist state of Hitler on the one hand, on the other, from the forces of social democracy in the West. This led Hayek to write the *Road to Serfdom* in 1944 which set out how state managed collectivist societies, specifically socialist oriented ones led only down one and indeed, the same path – to the tyranny of the soul, of the individual and so society. Quite simply, that is, that the vision of a shared end, or Telos leads to the loss of individual freedom and presumably therefore, freedom of thought and action. *The Road to Serfdom* was highly influential in developing the political thought of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan who both came to power in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Britain and America. Thus in illustrating the historical and philosophical origins of neoliberalism, the project 'to shrink the state' is perhaps now placed in context. It represents the notion that human affairs are best left to the market to decide and that this facilitates economic efficiency and human freedom. However, in the specific context of the UK, the development of a fully-fledged welfare state and National Health service in 1948 following the Beveridge Report in 1942 and the construction of the post-war consensus adds an intensity of interest to the notion of 'shrinking the state'. Britain emerged from the war as a model social democracy, combining planning and collectivism with civil liberties and the idea that all could share in this was a major aspect of the post-war consensus. This is what some critics argue the Conservative Party want to finally bring to an end and is thus the objective of 'shrinking the state'. Others have suggested, particularly with regard to education, that the project would like to see a

return to a pre-1870<sup>114</sup> state of affairs (Ball 2007: 64). Thus the fundamental premise of this thesis, that excellence defined as the emancipatory Hellenic ideal is a legitimating principle of English higher education, is set against the principles of neoliberalism. ‘Excellence’ as envisioned in this thesis culminates in a shared society of human flourishing, which as well as being a desired state of affairs for the individual, is a collective project in collaboration with the state for the development of a better life and one which transcends the realm of necessity. That is, it transcends competitive economic society and attempts to correct its inequalities.

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<sup>114</sup> 1870 is notable as the year that heralded ‘the education revolution’. This is said to mark the dawn of universalism in society which is synonymous with collectivism or the welfare state. See Ball (2007)

## **Chapter four**

### **The History of the English University and its idea**

This chapter will present a critical analysis of the literature which tells the story of the rise of the English university and thus the ideas and (or) legitimating principles which underpinned its evolution. These are ideas about the university and its purpose which arguably began to develop alongside and, because of, a developing system of higher education and state. That is to say, it is possible to argue that higher education itself acted and indeed, still acts as a liberating force once its potential to the flourishing of the individual and society is recognised; ideas of the good society developed and still develop from within the university and from education, as well as from intellectuals<sup>115</sup>, wider society and, the state. This argument is applicable to the liberal, utilitarian and, emancipatory philosophies of education. Thus the chapter will argue that excellence defined as the Hellenic ideal of individual and collective emancipation, amongst others, was a fundamental aspect and principle underpinning the development of English higher education (Armytage: 1964). In taking this position the chapter will also argue that the liberating elements of excellence were eventually subordinated to the liberal and utilitarian ideas of the university. That is to say, the emancipatory ideal of higher education was overshadowed, on one hand by the cultural ideal that knowledge is a valuable asset in itself and should be disseminated to each new generation - the liberal idea synonymous with Newman (Rothblatt: 1997; 7), and on the other, by the utilitarian idea that universities were training future generations to help maintain the administration of society (Anderson: 1992: 1). However, the development of our university system is not as simple as this seemingly dichotomous relationship between the liberal and utilitarian ideas might imply. Indeed, the development of the English university system can be best understood as a complex historical interaction between the tradition of the Victorian Oxford Ideal of higher education on one hand, (the liberal idea) and the development of the utilitarian but progressive civic universities which would come

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<sup>115</sup> See Vernon (2004) for argument that intellectuals, for example, Jowett in the 1870s helped shape institutions and informed the state's view of higher education and thus that the state was happy for institutions to reform themselves.

to represent the unity of teaching and research (new knowledge) on the other (Halsey: 1992), a dynamic complicated by the needs of an ever growing state bureaucracy. The pre-eminence of the role of the state figures in many accounts of the development of the English higher education system and is held responsible for the diminution of the idea of the public good inherent in the idea of the university and also importantly, for having reifying effects on its academic life, thereby damaging the public acclaim of these as autonomous institutes of free inquiry (<sup>116</sup>Barnett: 1990; Halsey: 1992). However, in exploring this as a further subsidiary argument (an argument expanded on later in this chapter when policy post-1945 is discussed) the chapter will suggest that the state has played a role in higher education from the earliest notion of a system and indeed, perhaps before then, as Vernon (2004) also argues. The chapter concludes with a presentation and analysis of the philosophy underpinning the creation of the new Robbins universities. It will be argued that the creation of these new universities reflected a desire for excellence by educationalists and, the state. A critical analysis of the Robbins Report itself is made at the outset of the following chapter which continues the historical journey of English higher education up until to the present day by way of a critical analysis of political policy. Thus this chapter does not focus on the detail of policy and does not attempt to offer a definitive historical analysis of the development of universities from the 1800s to the second half of the twentieth century. Rather, it surveys the ideas of excellence in this period.

### **Universalism, class, industry and expansion**

In the late 1800s and at the same time that higher education began to expand, state intervention precipitated the very beginnings of a universal system of education<sup>117</sup> and the development of a welfare system. The chapter contextualizes the development of the

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<sup>116</sup> See Barnett (1990:11) who discusses the concept of the ‘sociological undermining’ of higher education due to tightening of the relationship between state and wider society.

<sup>117</sup> See 1870 education act in Ball (2007), Archer (1984) and for detailed history of English education Curtis and Boulton (1960). See particularly, Armytage (1970) for paper on the different forces in society at that time in England arguing for a comprehensive system of schooling for all children. This includes the Education League, which was concerned about American and German hegemony and the industrial race to trade unionists who wanted education for the ‘common’ man to the social reformers who wanted to alleviate social conditions.

universities in England through the education acts of 1870 and 1902 through the Liberal social reforms of 1906-1914<sup>118</sup> to the introduction of the welfare state and National Health Service (NHS) in 1948. Depending on where one stands theoretically and politically, the education system was becomingly increasingly organised for various reasons. To prepare citizens for a productive life in a fully industrialised, urbanised class society, which Britain was to become between 1850 and 1900, because of the need to educate and control the ‘common’ man who would then use his vote more wisely (once he had been given it in the Reform Act 1884), in maintaining the political status quo (Ball: 2007; 63), because of campaigning by religious and mutual organisations and other social reform groups and individuals, because it was the moral action to take in the cause of a benevolent liberal society (Rothblatt: 1968; 23-5), to satisfy the educational needs and status requirements of the new mercantile and middle classes of the provinces (Roach: 1959; 145-146). Indeed, Scott (1984) states that:

Apart from Oxford and Cambridge and the four ancient Scottish universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and St Andrews, the British universities are the product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were created to meet the new intellectual demands stimulated by the growing elaboration of science, the new vocational demands of a rapidly industrialising economy, and the new social demands produced by the development of a liberal democracy and the educational revolution that was its inevitable accompaniment (Scott: 1984:117).

Finally, and importantly in terms of this thesis, there was also a need to utilize education and higher education as a national resource in a competitive international economic struggle.

Thus this chapter also makes a subsidiary argument that the seeds of the contemporary ‘global race’ can be discerned through a historical examination of the literature on education

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<sup>118</sup> See Rees (2001: 78-98) who represents the various arguments on the Liberal social reforms. That for example, firstly, they heralded the beginnings of a welfare state and the start of collectivism through a progressive liberalism which was reacting to the realisation of poverty revealed by Booth and Rowntree and Sideney and Beatrice Webb through the settlement schemes, that is, the education and welfare schemes which operated in poor areas, especially the East End of London. Secondly, they were part of a reform brought on through previous Conservative government reform, i.e. the education act 1902 and the commission of 1905 to look into poverty. Thirdly, fear of the emerging Labour Party. And finally, because of the condition of the people which was revealed through the poor state of the physical state of troops signing up to fight in the Boer War (1999-1902).

and higher education in Britain in the late 1800s and early 1900s, although this was a race for cultural and educational prestige as well as for scientific and technological superiority.

It is argued that the education system developed in the late 1800s along class lines (Ball 2007: 60) and that this determined the nature, purpose or philosophy of education in the schools which catered for the different social strands of society and that this came to be reproduced in higher education. However, it is also the case that in the 1800s there was a working class movement which saw education as an empowering force and indeed, this movement was encouraged in this belief by members of the Victorian Oxford and Cambridge elite<sup>119</sup> (<sup>120</sup>Armstrong: 1964: 136, 170: <sup>121</sup>Halsey: 1992; 2-58). There is perhaps then, not one simple or indeed, ideological reason which can explain the rise of the university and the increasing importance of higher education in the late 1800s and through into the 20<sup>th</sup> century but rather, a number of societal factors and philosophical ideas which pushed higher education from below while state imperatives pulled it from the top. The state imperative for increasing education which merged with the collectivism and idealism of the late 1880s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the state of the economy. This is because after a period of flux in early Victorianism, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain was experiencing a period of calm, after the violence of the early period of the century<sup>122</sup>, coined '*The Age of Equipoise*' (Jones: 1988; 5). In industrializing Britain in the fields of science and technology it was an active

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<sup>119</sup> See White (2005: 131) for discussion of liberal Anglican reforms to education (and universities) driven by among others, Arnold and Huxley and the relationship between science, literature and the promotion of culture, and particularly for discussion of 'the great education ladder'; the meritocratic but exclusionary aspect of 'culture' and the notion that this drags the educated into an elite community above everyone else.

<sup>120</sup> See also Armstrong (1964: 136, 170) for example, where Matthew Arnold is cited as an advocate of education to empower the working class. Arnold had great influence with politicians and was the brother-in-law of W. E. Forster - author of the education act of 1870 (Roos: 1977; 317).

<sup>121</sup> See Halsey (1992: 23-24) for discussions on A. Marshall (*The Future of the Working Classes*, 1925) argued by Halsey to be the originator of the utilitarian principle of higher education as well as the advocate of the working class and (1992: 34-5 for the concepts of elitist teachers, elitist researchers, expansionary teachers and expansionary researchers distinguished by Halsey and Trow and the relationship of these to the university extension movement founded by professor James Stewart of Cambridge to discussions on Mansbridge's (1923) democratising view of the university for example, the admission of women and working men, and the experience of the Workers Educational Association (WEA) and R.H. Tawney's university class tutorial movement. See also Roach (1959: 142) for discussion of extension schemes. (In Armstrong: 1955; 195).

<sup>122</sup> The early 1800s in Britain were a time of radicalism and unrest and which saw calls for electoral reform, i.e. universal suffrage. The Battle of Peterloo in Manchester in 1812 was the bloodiest event on British soil in the 1800s (Poole: 2006) and preceded the Chartist movement.

and dynamic era (Anderson: 1992: 6) in which new ideas were needed. Britain was in economic and industrial competition with other nations, principally Germany and America. Lyon Playfair (In Armytage: 1955; 195) a professor in the School of Mines in Jermyn Street and a juror at the Great Exhibition of 1851 stated that ‘a rapid transition is taking place in industry; raw material, formerly our capital advantage over other nations, is gradually being equalised in price, and available to all by improvements in locomotion, and [thus] Industry (*sic*) must in future be supported, not by a competition of local advantages, but by a competition of the intellect. Playfair (*ibid*) stated this before the Society of Arts in the following year and his solution to the problem was the establishment of industrial colleges for scientific research and teaching. Indeed, following this, parliament made grants to establish technical institutions in the capital and the Department of Science and Art was eventually created. Grants-in-aid were made to schools up and down the country which were awarded on the basis of the results of annual examinations. T.H. Huxley, who saw this as an imperative for introducing science into ordinary education, was instrumental in extending the curriculum from the focus on chemistry and mining to cover the whole field of applied science<sup>123</sup>. The grants spawned colleges that were later to become university institutions (Armytage: 1955: 196), for example, Exeter (1855), Reading (1860) and Southampton (1871). In 1867 the Paris Exhibition (Armytage: 1955; 219; 1964: 138) had demonstrated the need for Britain to drive towards regaining scientific and technological parity with her foreign competitors. The Royal Commission on Technical Education of 1881-84 had showed how the German organic chemical industry had taken a strong lead over Britain. The loss at first of the potential of the aniline dye industry to Germany was for example perhaps a seminal moment for the movement to introduce science into higher education. Moreover, in 1886 a royal Commission into the depression in trade showed the now superiority of other American and German techniques, leading Huxley (Armytage: 1955; 234) in the Times in 1887 to warn, in Darwinian terms typical of the times and echoed by Spencer in his

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<sup>123</sup> See also Anderson (1992: 8) for reference to the influence of John Stuart Mill, Lyon Playfair and Huxley on the inclusion of science in the curriculum of universities.



biological, competitive conception of education, of the need for an organised 'industrial war' in the 'struggle for existence'.

Thus from even this briefest of expeditions into the literature on the history of education it is possible to argue that the seeds of development of not just the civics but that of other institutions were created in conjunction with business, science, technology and industry and also, as part of educational aspiration and social movements, and indeed, the state. At roughly the same time as the Great Exhibition a number of Royal Commissions<sup>124</sup> (commencing in 1850) inquiring into what had become the rarefied and stultifying milieu of Oxford and Cambridge were undertaken. After some reluctance at these institutions (Vernon: 2004; 20) the commissions eventually persuaded the two ancient universities of the necessity of a radical overhaul of their governance (administrative and financial) and of the curriculum, as part of the drive to make education through extension more widely available in the national cause (Vernon: 2004; 9-10). The eventual abolition of the religious Tests<sup>125</sup>, combined with the liberal teaching and educational thought of Newman, the teaching and writing of Oxford Dons such as Jowett and Pattison (Halsey and Trow: 1971: 54) and the construction of a liberal education by Arnold<sup>126</sup> and Huxley would come to shape the lifeworld of the civics. Indeed, and in remaining in this philosophical vein, Matthew Arnold

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<sup>124</sup> See Carswell (1985: 27) who describes, in the context of the decision to commission the Robbins Report, how the Victorian Royal Commissions had left a lingering folk memory in the university's consciousness: 'they had done terrible things. Not only had they abolished celibacy: they had swept away whole swathes of fellowships and diverted funds to support chairs in modern subjects; they had thrown many other fellowships and scholarships open to competition; they had interfered outrageously in the internal government of universities and colleges'.

<sup>125</sup> The abolition of the religious 'Tests' in 1871 (Vernon: 2004: 31) allowed Roman Catholics, non-conformists and non-Christians to take up fellowships at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham. See also: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/34-35/26>  
Religion was a major source of cultural division in Victorian England. Anglicans refused to abandon the view that religious and secular education were inseparable (Anderson: 1992: 6): see Archer (1984) for full discussion of religious differences in education in the late 1800s, the 1870 education revolution and an argument on why statist won out in the creation of a universal system.

<sup>126</sup> See Anderson (1992: 6) who defines Arnold's vision of liberal education as 'the concept of the 'gentleman', the public schools, the examination system, the professional and public service ethos, and the preference for all-rounders over specialists'. Anderson cites the civil service exam (an example of the professionalization of society) as a move by Arnold to a more meritocratic selection process, although he argues that because of the universities make up this simply restricted the opportunity to the middle-classes. Anderson here also refers to Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) which popularized the notion of general culture, and was chiefly literary but importantly detached liberal education from the classics so that any subject could be taught in a liberal way, fitting in well with the specialized, single subject and the research ideal but that this encouraged a bias against the purely vocational.

realised after studying the continental systems of education as a governmental commissioner that England was lagging behind its neighbours. He proposed an extension of the universities through faculties to the regions to raise the great seats of population like Liverpool and Leeds to the status of Strasbourg and Lyons in order that they become intellectual centres as well as 'mere places of business' (Armytage: 1955; 220: Halsey and Trow: 1971; 53). He also proposed that Oxford and Cambridge re-channel their resources in a manner to facilitate this. The dynamics of the later Victorian era were then, as argued above, complex. The movement for education and indeed higher education was driven by a new emergent middle class, the professionals and managers of mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century industrialised, imperial Britain, (Ball: 2007; 58) which saw a need for themselves and for their children, which a university education could provide. It was also driven by a near existential anxiety which was a consequence of a desire to win against Britain's competitors in science and technology. Moreover, it was driven by a desire to use education as a democratising force in society to, perhaps paradoxically, preserve the order (Anderson: 1992; 9) and importantly, in order to change it, but also to allow for the fullest possible development of the individual as an exercise in the intellectual strengthening and development of a learning society.

### **Institutional identity**

In moving onto the principles and the philosophies underpinning early higher education, It is possible to say that the definite foundations of our modern university system were really only laid from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards and cemented at the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> (Anderson: 1992: 4). This was the time frame in which our civic universities were established and despite the obvious utilitarian purpose of these institutions the elements of the Hellenic ideal are clearly discernible. It is often stated that these universities were established very much in response to the needs of the economy, locally and nationally. The late 1800s witnessed the rise of a burgeoning state bureaucracy to administer a developing modernising society. The first universities along with post-Royal Commission Oxbridge were, as Delanty (2002: 37) argues, part of the modernising and rationalization

process of the industrial revolution and modernity. These universities would certainly go on to provide and train the teachers, civil servants and administrators for the developing bureaucracy of an equally developing government and eventually for a welfare state in post-1945 Britain. However, they would also go on to become vital sites of innovation in technological and scientific development, institutions, where the codification of knowledge – theory - also developed, and, so places where academicism lived - side-by-side - with instrumentalism. They were utilitarian institutions in the literal sense then, responding to the needs of industrial society and were often sponsored by business and (or) political elites (Scott: 1984; 70: 1995; 62). However, Schwarz (2004: 994) argues that this expansion did not simply represent the ‘professionalization’ of society as Anderson (1992) has put it, but rather, that this expansion in education was due to the credentialization of society which itself was fuelled amongst other things by the introduction of formal examination systems, the expansion of public schools, the creation of a state school system and the expansion of female education and teacher training, which while fulfilling the employment needs of the state and industry, was also fuelled by competition amongst the middle-classes who worried about the future prospects of their sons and daughters and saw no reason why their children should not have the benefit of a university education even if this was not at Oxbridge. As Schwarz<sup>127</sup> puts it: ‘Behind the growth in exams there lay the firm Victorian middle-class perception that the pressure of growing numbers on the livelihood of professional men had increased, was increasing, and ought not to continue to increase at such a rate. Education seemed an obvious way to increase the chances for successful employment of one’s children, with three times as many public schools being founded between 1850 and 1870 as during the previous century’ (Schwarz: 2004; 943-4). This would suggest then, that education was used or certainly viewed as an exclusionary force by middle-class

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<sup>127</sup> See Schwarz (2004) for his thesis on the cyclical process initiated by the rise ‘examining society’ of the late 1800s: the rise of secondary schools produced student teachers (significantly, training at civics) which in turn produced graduates who went back into teaching. Schwarz argues that this was particularly the case with women. This cycle also included the training of accountants and solicitors and caught the civics in a ‘vicious circle’ of the vocational training of undergraduates, preventing expansion into the territory of Oxbridge.

Victorians<sup>128</sup>. However, and as Delanty (2002: 37) argues, the new universities – which were established between 1890 and 1930 - were closely aligned to the cities and regions which had created them and to which they belonged. These were what came to be known as the civics. Delanty argues that these institutions had no concrete identity and no definite relationship with the state as such had been established. It has also been argued (Archer, p.70 in Scott, 1984) that the support of business had been a precondition for the establishment of the universities in the form of sponsorship by local industries. For example, the University of Bristol by Wills Tobacco, the University of Reading by Huntley and Palmer's Biscuits and the University of Newcastle by the mining industry or in the case of Birmingham by political patronage<sup>129</sup>.

This does not and must not imply however, that higher education was not seen as a public good and transformational force, even in an era still very much permeated by classical liberalism and the doctrine of laissez faire, despite the Liberal social reforms and the work by social campaigners. And certainly, not in the civic minded and high moral times of Victorian England where higher education was becoming a cultural value, particularly in the industrial midlands and the north, and to conceptualize higher education as simply as arm of an ever growing state bolstered by business would present a very one-dimensional picture of universities and their purpose. Indeed, and contrary to Anderson (1992:6) who argues that the new entrepreneurial class, industrialists and merchants of this period saw universities as irrelevant, Jones states that 'as the 19<sup>th</sup> century advanced, [and] Oxbridge and the establishment evolved, the North and the Midlands, mercantile, industrial and non-conformist, created a new culture and, [along with this] its institutions' (Jones:1988; 13). In other words, the parvenu adopted education as a culture of their own. Powell and Dayson state that

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<sup>128</sup> See Anderson (1992: 9) who argues that higher education was used as a social filter by the middle-class, especially with regard to access to the civil service.

<sup>129</sup> See <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/about/history/vision.aspx> for history of Birmingham University and its founder, Joseph Chamberlain.

the primary focus of the civics was to support the local economy and society through research, training and the pursuit of excellence. In effect the civics wanted to take the finest parts of Oxbridge but replace the perceived hidebound tradition with a commitment to economic and social progress. The civic universities regarded themselves as modern universities and institutions of modernity (Powell and Dayson: 2013; 145).

Powell and Dayson go on to say that as products of the Enlightenment the civics had a commitment to the universalist concepts of science, knowledge and truth, and that this sometimes brought them into conflict with their 'place' or locality which saw them as 'alien' to their community but that civic pride did not diminish and that 'institutional mutuality of the formative period evolved into an admiration by local elites of the prosperity of a favoured child' (Powell and Dayson: 2013; 145). So how did these institutions, which it could be argued are an expression of excellence in themselves and which developed independently, at different times and under different local cultural conditions, and so perhaps in contradiction to Delanty, with different but concrete identities as institutions, come to fruition? Jones (1988: 1) describes mid-Victorian higher education as 'embryonic' and points out that the 'redbrick' or 'civic' universities evolved from colleges founded in many English cities, often on shoestring budgets, for assorted reasons and purposes, and that many failed but others succeeded. After the famous Manchester College (1851), institutions were founded at Leeds (1874), Bristol (1876), Birmingham (1880), Liverpool (1881), Reading (1892), and Sheffield (1897). In fact, and as Vernon (2004:41) demonstrates in his work, many of these universities began life as a consequence of the extension schemes run by Benjamin Jowett, the reforming Oxford tutor and advocate of liberal reform. Indeed, Reading and Bristol are examples of his success in this<sup>130</sup>. Thus simply stating that business was a pre-condition for the creation of universities is perhaps to erase the complexity of an

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<sup>130</sup> See Vernon (2004: 42) who also points out that in the end Jowett's extension scheme proved too ambitious and that he decided to follow the Cambridge scheme and organise travelling extension lecturers, for example, those by Michael Sadler. Also here, see Vernon's discussion on the 'settlement scheme' pioneered by Samuel Barnett at Toynbee Hall in the 1880s. This was when graduates spent time living in poor communities acting as beacons of light inspiring the working classes. R.H. Tawney was one of these tutors, working for the WEA and spending his time between Toynbee Hall and Rochdale teaching working men. Additionally, see Vernon (2004: 42-4) for discussion on women's increasing participation in universities, for example, the establishment of Girton College, Cambridge by Emily Davies and others.

age into which universities came. Indeed, these universities evolved slowly and unevenly from medical schools, mechanics' institutes, technical schools and colleges and emerged into a period of history which was witnessing great change politically, economically, socially and, culturally, especially with regard to education. Jones, after presenting the idea that a clear line of descent can be drawn from the Dissenting<sup>131</sup> academies of the 18th century, whilst dismissing any great significance between the social need for these and their efficacy, does suggest an independent movement for education in the provinces. However, he goes on to argue that 'two sorts of educational institutions preceded civic universities in every provincial city: medical schools and mechanics institutes' and that '...these were largely attempts to deal with the educational problems of the dawning scientific age... and largely a creation of the middle class in the interest of their inferiors...' (Jones: 1988; 19), suggesting an element of *noblesse oblige* as well as idealism and indeed, pragmatism in the creation of these schools. Jones sees the establishment of these schools as failures as far as their original purpose was conceived but goes on to say that these colleges were taken over by the middle-class as a source of recreation and mild educational entertainment and then by the new lower-middle classes of Victorian Britain, indeed, as these colleges became 'functionally differentiated' (*ibid*) they highlighted a need in the provincial towns and cities which would eventually be served by the civics. Jones goes on to say that the schools had been a 'genuine attempt to solve the problems of a changing society' (*ibid*). (Mechanics Institutes' had their origins in Glasgow in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and arrived in London via George Birkbeck whose name was subsequently given to one of the colleges of the University of London). So it can be argued from these sources that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period in which a development was taking place in the collective mode of thought, in terms of what education was for, and, who should have it. Indeed, the early story as Halsey and Trow (1971: 40, 52, 54) have stated is a provincial one-provincial aspirations, provincial pressures and provincial responses (*sic*).

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<sup>131</sup> See Beloff (1968: 15-16). Religious restrictions, the Act of uniformity 1662, prevented members other than those of the established church from joining universities of which there were none in England other than Oxbridge, hence the establishment of 'dissenting academies' in the 1600s which survived into the nineteenth century.

Owens College, Manchester (1851) which after its establishment and strongly supported by Mark Pattison and Lyon Playfair would become part of the new Victoria University which forming the federation of Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester, was a reflection of the ‘aspirations of the rising industrial bourgeoisie’ (Halsey and Trow: *ibid*). It like other provincial colleges became affiliated to the University of London, and like Durham (1832) which was originally founded on an ecclesiastical basis was eventually able to offer a London Degree as an extended member of that university. London itself was formed much earlier because of the ever increasing demand and, desire for education and was rooted in attempts by a group of influential dissenters, including Lord Brougham, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill ‘to combat the social, and more especially, the religious exclusiveness of the existing foundations’ (Beloff: 1968; 17). The University College London (UCL) was founded in 1828 on the basis of equality, difference, diversity and included women. Kings College, London like Durham<sup>132</sup> was founded on an ecclesiastical basis in 1829. (UCL: 2010; Kings College; 2012). However, and despite the examples of Durham and Kings, intellectual change continued on into the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This can be explained in terms of the desired notion of what society could or ought to be. This philosophy emanated from collectivist quarters, for example, from Matthew Arnold the educationalist and school inspector discussed above, and by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (co-founders of the LSE) and the Fabian Society, (Collyer: 2012; 55) and Rowntree and Booth, all social reformers (Marshall: 2006; 36). Indeed, Armytage (1964; 170) states that opinion following Arnold argued for democratic reform and was moulded by men like T.H. Green<sup>133</sup> at Oxford who, and perhaps in the spirit of the Enlightenment, saw an overriding human purpose for

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<sup>132</sup> See Barnett (1990: 19) where the foundation of the college in Gower Street is discussed alongside the more conventional religious establishments of Durham and Kings and the attempts of Newman and others to establish a Catholic University of Ireland.

<sup>133</sup> See Vernon (2004: 41) who discusses Green’s ‘systematic’ philosophical basis for university outreach and educational development. Vernon states that Green’s social ethos inspired a cohort of Oxford graduates who went to work in education, community work and politics ultimately helping to shape the nature of the English university system. Vernon goes on to discuss Green’s engagement with German idealism and the belief that there is an ultimate reality underlying the phenomenal world and that in short, that the realisation of eternal human consciousness could be realised in everyday experience through an educative process of self-awareness and spiritual perfection through work in the community which promotes the common good.

education alongside the maintenance and indeed, the strengthening of the state. That is to say, a belief that ‘...the essence of human life lay in the deep, deliberate pursuit of an ideal of its own betterment ...’ (In Armytage: 1964; 170). Moreover, and in discussing the foundation of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Reading and Sheffield at the beginning of the twentieth century, Truscot (1943: 26) states that:

It is impossible to speak too warmly of the men chiefly instrumental in their foundation - members, for the most part, of wealthy and influential families, engaged in business, and often graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, who could have so easily have satisfied any zeal they might have felt for education by endowing scholarships to one of those universities to be competed for solely by students of their own city or area. Had they been content to do this, not only would students in perpetuity have benefited from their generosity, but the names of the donors would have been assured of a perpetual place on the roll of benefactors of their college or university. But their generosity and (a more significant thing) their insight, initiative and faith went far beyond this. They foresaw that, as the tide of prosperity in the country continued to rise, educational ideals and standards would rise with it and the four universities already in existence would soon be no longer sufficient for national needs. They believed that a university established with noble, worthy and disinterested aims in the twentieth century would in time do as much for education as the one that dated from the twelfth. They foresaw, again that such a foundation could from the very first, exercise a powerful moral and cultural influence upon the life of a rapidly growing community which was necessarily preoccupied with material values.

Truscot goes on to say at what personal [financial] risk these men undertook their work but how the ideal of something better for generations to come after them drove them on – presumably, this was the ‘idea’ of ‘society’ as a collective entity and that ‘humanity was something worth not only preserving but, developing’ (*ibid*) (*emphasis added*). Crucially, then, this extract helps to support the central argument presented in this chapter and indeed, in this thesis, that excellence, defined as an ideal which promotes human flourishing through higher education, regardless of material interests and geared to societal development, is a legitimating principle of English higher education. Halsey (1992; 61) though, argues that the civics offered a utilitarian training for middle-class careers in courses typically concentrated on a single subject and directed especially towards the newer technological and professional occupations such as chemistry, engineering, teaching in state grammar schools and the scientific civil service. However, and as Halsey also points out, the culture of the civics, which arguably, encompassed the liberal and vocational philosophies of education would



become indisputably that of Oxford, as the Dons sent out their emissaries into the wider world of the 'Redbrick' (Truscot: 1944) and so teaching and the Idea of higher education would become for a time again, at least, firmly the Oxford Idea. The civics universities had originally based their structure on the Scottish model in the shape of professorial rule and departmental organization but this was assimilated by an Oxford that had 'met the challenge of Victorian classical industrialism and religious non-conformity, partly by reforming and expanding its own statutes and curriculum, partly by drawing in the sons and daughters of successful businessmen, and partly by the movement of Oxford and Cambridge Dons to teach in the newly created universities' (Halsey: 1992; 61), thereby subsuming the latter's perceived utilitarian mission under the Oxford ideal<sup>134</sup>, despite, it might be said, somewhat ironically, that institutions own embrace with science. (Rothblatt in Halsey: 1992; 61). Halsey (1996: 65), perhaps in contradiction to Truscot's idealistic view of the culturally, independent development of the civics represented above argues that:

In the long history of the ancient universities the greatest challenge to their pre-eminence came with the beginnings of industrialism and the educational aspirations of Dissent. Subsequently during the last century the needs of an increasingly technological age and the demands of educational opportunity for the plebs have resulted in the establishment first in London and later in the great provincial centres of modern industry and commerce, notably Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, and Liverpool. From the outset these universities have been devoted more to science than to the arts, more to the training of the specialist than the cultivation of the 'educated man' (even in the arts their main subject has been school teachers), more to research at the frontiers of knowledge than to the preservation and transmission of accumulated scholarship. Their standards of scholarship are seldom equalled and probably not excelled either in Oxbridge or in the world. Yet their challenge to the social dominance of the ancient foundations has so far been completely without success. The reasons for this will take us into the peculiarities of the history of the English class system (Halsey: 1996: 65).

Halsey goes on to say that the modern universities of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century are a bourgeoisie creation rather than that of the aristocratic-gentry and so possess the culture of the non-conformist provincial business class. Quoting Shils, Halsey goes on to show how this culture was usurped by Oxbridge, the class system and the Oxford Ideal:

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<sup>134</sup> See Vernon (2004: 4) for a discussion on academic drift whereby new institutions lose their distinctive new identities and on the thesis that this and the hierarchy of the English university system were actively encouraged by central government.

living to itself, puritanical, pharisaical, proud and excessively sensitive to the slights and denials of the traditional society, the bourgeoisie of the big provincial towns, partly from local patriotism, partly from resentment, partly from love of learning created... a genuine civilization – earnest and profound – and with the modern universities as its chief monument... [this culture] has now been routed. The aristocratic gentry has come back into the saddle, and with little to dispute its dominion (Shils, in Halsey: 1996; 66).

As Halsey also points out, even T.H Huxley the greatest exponent of the scientific university for an industrial civilization asserted that ‘the primary business of the universities is with pure knowledge and pure art – independent of all application to practice; with progress in culture, not with increase in wealth’ (Halsey: 1996; 67)<sup>135</sup>. This was not perhaps, the original intent of those who argued for the extension and liberalisation of education in the latter half of the 1880s, as it did not and would not in the future, of course, suit completely, either the causes of industry, science and technology or, that of the educational reformers. Educational reform is presumably about widening access and participation as a right and an empowering mechanism for those previously excluded in the democratization of society and to create a learned and learning society. With this comes more equitable access to employment and the fruits of a developing society and so also presumably, for this developmental process to be successful, it is necessary to combine human development with industrial, scientific and technological process. Thus the liberal idea of education combines with the utilitarian and emancipatory philosophies to remake society. The idea of higher education and what a university should be and stand for in society as a dynamic institution driving the economy and humanity forward was somewhat lost then, when ‘Oxbridge’

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<sup>135</sup> See Curtis and Boulton (1960: 147) who after listing Huxley’s subject suggestions for a school curriculum: biology, English language and literature, modern history and geography with special reference to Britain and the study of the world’s great art, and, sociology, politics and morals, state that ‘Such a balanced diet would surely produce the free man’ then quote from Huxley’s collected essays (1895) as follows: ‘one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience, who has learned to love beauty, whether of Nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself’. Huxley, T. H., Collected Essays, p.83, Macmillan, 1895. Attributed to Huxley is this quote on science and culture: ‘if having ‘culture is defined as knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world then the natural sciences must exist alongside literature as a central component of culture. ...’ (anon) The first part of the original and correct quote ‘knowing the best that has been thought and known in the world’ originally comes from Arnold (1960: 31; originally 1867) and so these extracts represents an exchange between the two men at the Rede Lecture in 1882.

reassumed its dominance of the higher education system and the Victorian Oxford Idea of the University, would as Halsey argues, become the imaginary of the whole sector.

What is of most important here however, is the difference between the Idea or the ‘imaginary’ of the University, in other words, the ideal and the university’s actual historical purpose, for as Halsey and Trow argue, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the relation of the University to the economy underwent a fundamental change. ‘Though modified at every point by the older Oxford and Cambridge ideals of a liberal education for gentlemen, this belatedly widened to the conception of admissible professions and vocations, and came to terms with the applied sciences and, business studies’ (Halsey and Trow: 1971; 52). Indeed, Halsey and Trow (*ibid*) go on to say that science had become an institution and that it was fully incorporated into universities as an integral part of their life as teaching and research bodies and into industries concerned with the practical development of fundamental research in the sciences and its application to the industrial process. Thus it could be argued that the notion that the Victorian Oxford idea prevented the development of universities as dynamic institutions is slightly overplayed.

### **A conclusion**

The civic universities along with the old medieval institutions of Oxbridge would make up what can be referred to as the English university system between the First World War and the early and mid-1960s, when the mass system of higher education that we are familiar with today was given the political impetus by Robbins that it required later to evolve. It is perhaps this period or ‘golden age’ (although this is placed variously and the period post-1945 to the 1960s) that critics of current government policy, who today bemoan the loss of idealism from the University are thinking of when they speak of the loss of autonomy and liberal values from higher education. Autonomy is often discussed in relation to the much heralded University Grants Committee (UGC) which acted as a buffer between universities and government and provided Treasury Grants to the universities. This was formed in 1919 along with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), the Association of University Teachers (AUT) to be followed by the National Union of Students

in the early 1920s as ‘a set of definable relations’ between the state and higher education which became a system (Halsey: 1992; 60). However, universities were then, seemingly at least, in spite of these early definable relations, which included some limited funding from government via the UGC, masters of their own destiny with regard to mission, that is to say their philosophy or ethos – or the legitimating principle underpinning institutions. But what has really been the basis, the rationale for higher education in the past? In other words, what are the foundations on which our current system is built? To argue for or against the proposition that our universities are being changed beyond recognition by current political policy, it is surely necessary to understand first what our institutions once were, and most importantly, what fuelled their creation. The first section of this chapter has sought to provide evidence of the existence of the Hellenic ideal as a legitimating principle in early English higher education. From the discussions on A. Marshall, the WEA, Arnold, Huxley, Stewart, Pattison, Jowett and Green and Truscot’s arguments on the philanthropists who helped found the civics and others, it is argued here that the idea of higher education defined as a transformative, empowering force for the individual and society was present in late 1800s and early 1900s England. Depending on the philosophical orientation of the individuals promoting education at that time, this idea saw higher education as an ideal worth possessing in the cultural sphere for its own sake, and (or) as a public and collective (democratic) good. The latter philosophy was personified in the ethical Christian socialism of R.H. Tawney (Taylor and Steele: 2011; 1-43). However, there were also strong utilitarian and vocational factors pushing the development of higher educations which would lead to a symbiotic relationship between the universities, the professions and the state.

Indeed, this chapter has argued that there was not one reason or legitimating principle underpinning the development of English higher education from the 1850s onwards, but rather, that many factors came together, including a developing state apparatus and organised education system to service the needs of the state, the professions and science and technology along with a reforming desire to extend education and its possibilities and potential to the people. In the context of that first dynamic, and with regard to a discussion in

Macleod and Moseley on the necessity to find other factors other than state intervention for the amount and direction of science teaching in universities it is stated that:

There is an equally pressing need to know more about the ways in which the universities sought to make themselves more 'serviceable' to the community. In modern democratic society, as T. H. Marshall once wrote, 'The State and the professions are gradually being assimilated to one another'<sup>136</sup>. In the same process, the professions and the universities formed a closer alliance. The ideal of 'service' which had given unity to conflicting visions of the university from Arnold and Newman to Haldane, gave to the universities a willingness to attract those professions (including medicine, engineering, architecture, even civic design) which would embody an attractive sense of social relevance. The five decades before 1914 saw this 'ideal' stimulated by professional interests, shaped by the universities, and given the sanction of academic legitimacy. Important reforms in university teaching were the product of broad governmental decrees and local political interests, but also of more deliberate pressures exerted by the professions. (Macleod and Moseley:1978: 98).

Indeed, the story is not always one of idealism as Anderson (1992) and Schwarz (2004) argue and the expansion of higher education in the late 1800s benefited the existing middle-classes and the parvenu as well as however as coming to touch the lives of the working-class and women. It is also true to say (as is discussed in more detail below) that the resurgence of Oxbridge and their dominance over the civics led to the creation and reinforcement of the establishment and thus the expansion of higher education served the vested interests of Oxbridge (Beloff: 1970: 15), and that this has implications for access to and participation in higher education (Vernon: 2004). Moreover, the contradictions inherent in the notion of excellence are present in the ideas of the 1800s England<sup>137</sup>. The earlier representations of Green (Vernon: 2004: 41) and Schleiermacher (Please see literature review and Rüegg:

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<sup>136</sup> T. H. Marshall, in *Sociology at the Crossroads and Other Essays*, (London, 1963)

<sup>137</sup> See Barnett (1990:23) who argues that although the ideas of the university can at any one time be seen to be culturally specific, it is possible to pin down the emancipatory (liberal) idea of higher education. Barnett argues that there are recurring themes within different conceptions of the university: knowledge, truth, reason, wholeness, dialogue and criticism. There is a dominant or constant idea of a community of scholars therefore. Moreover, and drawing on the Platonic idea of higher education and individual development, Barnett sees the spirit of critical inquiry as the mechanism for new understandings. To quote: 'A fundamental process of higher education is a lessening of the taken-for-grantedness of the individuals hold on the world. It is in this sense that higher education essentially embodies a liberal outlook or, as we might say today, an emancipatory concept of higher education'. Barnett also goes on to say that it can be argued that the different models or notions of higher education reflect the not only the exigencies of the time but reflect certain social interests which the particular variant was designed to defend. Barnett states that it is for example, possible to read Newman's conception as a thinly disguised apologia for a leisured class faced with the prospect of vocational education for the emerging bourgeoisie.

2011) in particular demonstrate the sometimes esoteric nature of higher education, for example, the adherence to reason thus the pursuit of learning, knowledge and truth for their own sake. Similarly, the liberal idea of the university and of culture can be viewed as exclusionary, that is to say, it promotes, perhaps arguably, the creation of a sphere of existence in society which is elitist; in a functionalist as opposed to an egalitarian meritocracy it is only available to some. Of course the same can be said with regard to the utilitarian philosophy and vocational participation at universities and thus later in the professions. If access to and participation in higher education is unequal, then for some opportunities in employment are of course harder to come by, especially in an ‘examination society’ where qualifications, indeed, the right qualifications are required for unbridled individual success (*emphasis added*) (Schwarz: 2004). Education and higher education were also being drawn, particularly through science and technology in the late 1800s, into the Nation’s international competitive economic struggle, a driver for university expansion which as is argued here is also at the fore in contemporary times. T.H. Marshall argued that ‘the end of the eighteenth century saw a growing interest in equality as a principle of social justice’ and that the notion of citizenship and the extension of rights, although not complete and not threatening the class based capitalism of the times followed through into the early twentieth century in a ‘growing national consciousness and awakening of public opinion, a sense of community and common heritage’ (Marshall: 2006; 35). Thus, it is possible to argue that the view that higher education could lead to something better – could be beneficial for human flourishing was encompassed in a wider philosophy of society in the late 1800s and early 1900s. And thus it can also be argued that the notion that we can strive through education for something better than we have, and that we currently are, was a legitimating principle of the English university. The second section of this chapter now looks at the relationship of the university to the state and the latter’s influence on higher education in the lead up to the First World War, between the wars and particularly post-1945. This section argues again that excellence can be seen as legitimating principle of English higher education in this later period and that this can be seen through state policy.

## **Excellence and the state**

The First World War stimulated interest and investment in the universities as the possibilities of military, scientific and technological development and industrial efficiency were realised. The demand for places due to the growth of grammar schools after the Education Act (1902)<sup>138</sup> stimulated growth in higher education as did the need for teachers which the civics supplied. Women also boosted student numbers and the number of undergraduates studying the arts and especially teaching (See Schwarz: 2004). The First World War also of course demonstrated the usefulness of universities to the national cause in terms of science and technology, to a growing democracy and so bureaucracy and, the economy. Higher education was driven from above and below and especially by science. Indeed, as Macleod and Moseley (1978) argue the finances of the universities during the late 1800s and early 1900s were in need of state support due to the increased cost of subject specialization, increasing numbers of new buildings and importantly, the cost of teaching science. Macleod and Moseley put it like this:

whether the universities were to continue serving the ideals of 'liberal education', as defined for many by the mere retention of compulsory Greek and Latin, but by others as the cherished production of the 'scholar-gentleman'. The second was whether the universities would resist the natural centrifugal tendency towards greater specialisation in all disciplines. The third was whether the universities, having suffered falling incomes through agricultural depression, and now meeting higher costs than could be met from fees, could survive the legitimate demands of staff and students for new buildings, equipment, and accommodation. These questions agitated all faculties and not less in Oxbridge than in the provinces; but all were prompted by science, and by the special demands its instruction made (Macleod and Mosely: 1978; 98)

Macleod and Mosely also say that 'Historians of higher education have yet to consider systematically what educational economists know intuitively, that educational costs ultimately exceed the ability of individuals, unaided, to pay. Eventually, a higher power has to assist, or the undertaking will fail. The principle was accepted in the 1870s in primary education, and through the 1880's was extended slowly into secondary and technical

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<sup>138</sup> The Education Act 1902 re-organised the school system by abolishing school boards and ending the dual system whereby all schools, including the voluntary sector came under local authority control. The act also made significant provision for secondary and technical education. See Eaglesham (2010) for discussion of the problems in implementing the education act of 1902.

education' (Macleod and Moseley: 1978; 98). In other words, the state must intervene to subsidize higher education and indeed, this is what happened as Macleod and Moseley point out, when prompted by provincial universities government began 'to intercede in university affairs with £15,000 included in the Treasury Estimates for 1889 for the University Colleges, this was the first of what would become by 1905 a substantial subvention, dispensed eventually by a 'University Grants Committee' (Macleod and Moseley: 1978; 98). Lord Haldane<sup>139</sup>, amongst others, was instrumental in creating this agency which channelled funds from the treasury without undermining university autonomy. However, and between the wars and during the depression and with still little cash from the UGC, the civics' newly acquired reputation and status as the new universities diminished as compared to Oxbridge, the dominant universities. As Halsey states, 'between the wars the redbricks lived through a demoralizing period of self-criticism and low esteem, poorly regarded by the national intelligentsia (Halsey: 1992; 78)<sup>140</sup> and moreover, during this inter-war period higher education was still very much for the elite. As Reay and Davies *et al.* state: 'Before the Second World War, university education was the preserve of a small elite. In 1938 less than 2 per cent of the relevant age cohort were (*sic*) attending universities and among women the percentage was less than 0.5' (Reay and Davies *et al.*: 2001; 856)<sup>141</sup>. Moreover, and after the interventions of the state through the Royal Commissions, Oxbridge (Vernon: 2004) found

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<sup>139</sup> See Salter and Tapper (1994: 157) where the Haldane principle named after R.B.Haldane and his report of 1918 is described: 'what was known as the Haldane principle that the control of research should be separated from the executive functions of government. It is often read as meaning that the state should not interfere with the direction of research in universities, although Salter and Tapper argue contrary to that here.

<sup>140</sup> Through the liberal philosophy of higher education the university was conceived as an institution which inhabited a higher cultural realm, and thus one unconcerned directly with the social utility of its subjects. This view is synonymous with the conservative cultural elitism of Abraham, Benda, Flexner and to some extent, with regard to the visions, of for instance, Moberly and Truscot (Armytage: 1955; 266; Halsey: 1996: 47; 48). This cultural elitism can be seen in the binary construction of a distinction between homo sapiens (academics) and homo faber (smiths), for example, 'the technological-democratic' dystopia envisaged by Moberly (*ibid*) or the 'instrumental' university, which is conceived as being closely aligned with and committed to the technocratic utilitarian values of business (the economy) and thus the state, through teaching and research geared towards the ends of the government which in turn is argued to undermine the 'intrinsic' values of the academy (*emphasis added*) (Price: 1992; 241). Indeed, R. H. Tawney belonging to a different perspective to Moberly, believed that 'the economic man stood in the way of a socialist and democratic future' and that industry should have a social rationale rather than a private one (Rothblatt: 1968: 92)

<sup>141</sup> See Macleod and Mosely (1978: 92) who discuss the low participation rate of women at university, particularly in science and the determination required for them to attend higher education at all.



itself in this period back at the top of a pyramidal like structure which saw the two ancient universities closely followed by London, forming a 'golden triangle'. If this did not strangle the civics as Truscot (1943) argues, then these new universities were certainly reduced in stature by the criticisms directed at them (Shattock: 2011; 17). Benda, Flexner<sup>142</sup> and A.N. Whitehead (Shattock: 2012; 9) in the 1930s for example launched stinging criticism of the Redbricks (civics), and indeed London, over the concentration of technological and technical studies and thus the utilitarianism or 'vocationalism'<sup>143</sup> at those institutions (Taylor and Steele: 2011; 45). This disengagement with the developing world of English higher education was also in evidence at Oxbridge. As Halsey points out, Oxford and Cambridge initially remained aloof from the 'new' universities were isolationist, and even at first showed disdain towards the CVCP. However, and as a consequence of cooperation between the Oxbridge colleges, the calibration of the curriculum towards the demands of the 'new world', and extramural activities through the extension schemes and an easing of access, the medieval institutions can be said to have recolonized the newly emerging sector of higher education. Indeed, Halsey states: 'All in all Oxbridge became a real entity within the British university system after 1914. It was not only the ritual of competitive solidarity in the annual boat-race. It was an intricate network of institutional and individual exchange, born of common interest in perpetuating the Oxbridge ideal with a growing system that might otherwise have engulfed the ancient universities' (Halsey: 1992; 70). And indeed, and because of the establishment, civil service and government recruiting system, which appointed graduates of Oxbridge, and Oxford, in particular, to positions of bureaucratic and political power, the latter would have great influence over the UGC, the Treasury and

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<sup>142</sup> For example, Flexner (Armytage: 1955; 266, 267) denounced university colleges and schools like the King's College of Household Studies and Social Science founded in 1929, as having no place in a university. He then cites courses ranging from certificates of Higher Commercial Studies, in Photographic Technology to a course in Journalism at UCL, Civic Design at Liverpool, and Automobile Engineering at Bristol as unworthy of the institution of the university.

<sup>143</sup> See Powell and Dayson (2013: 143) who in the context of a discussion on the 'enterprising' civics say that it is necessary to place this in a historical context and state that 'essentially there is a dialectic between those who argue higher learning is an end in itself, a selfish activity to develop one's own knowledge, often connected with pure research and associated with Lao-Tzu, Aristotle and Newman and by contrast, Confucius and Plato who argued that learning is about integration into society and thus linked to applied research': thus a utility for society.

government creating a 'common culture' (Shattock: 2012; 15) between the two. That is to say, as its sons and daughters moved from the dreaming spires to positions of power and influence as civil servants vice-chancellors, for example as a chairman of the UGC, and a secretary of state or two at the department of education, Oxford became an integral part of the establishment. Thus it could be argued that because of this hierarchy the universities of the early 20th century remained an elitist institution in every sense. In 1902 there were 20,000 students in all and 2,000 university teachers, of whom a third were at Oxbridge. At the end of the Second World War these institutions numbered only 16 and had developed in their own way and were self-governing, Oxbridge as collegiate institutions, the University of London as a federation and the regional universities in the provincial cities as the civics. Thus there existed, a diversity of institution and of governance within a small but developing system of higher education. However, and more importantly and as Simon (1996: 31) states, 'the understanding that universities were independent was shared by all'. That is, by the universities, the public and, the government. Thus the implication is that universities had their own identity and that any relationship with the state, however insignificant, had no negative effects on the lifeworld of the institution of higher education. Indeed, and to summarize this section, and in particular, Halsey's argument on elitism, and what amounts to the idea of class domination by the two ancient institutions, it may be true to say that Oxbridge reassumed its dominance of the sector or system, such as it was in this period, but it is also reasonable to argue the case that a distinction needs to be made, on the one hand between a particular philosophy of higher education, that is, what universities teach and research and what the beliefs of those engaged in this actually are, and on the other, who dominates the system and benefits from this. It was clear from the discussions earlier in this chapter that the literature shows a very different reason for the extension of higher education, and indeed, why a philosophy of teaching arose in the civics; it was because higher education had been extended as a beneficent act but also because education policy and the professions together expanded the system of examination in society which increasingly led to a demand for a university education. The role of the new universities was

not then, simply a consequence of a strategy by Oxbridge to colonise the new emerging institutions with an idea and to maintain the power of the ancient universities. One might argue that the train had already left the station, so to speak, when Oxbridge decided to re-engage with a developing system of higher education in England (whether or not this was with the encouragement of the state). Indeed, amongst the other reasons presented above, a major factor was a deep belief in education, in its power, and in the right for others to have access to it for a better future. And although power is always important in the story of English higher education (as is politics) there is no one ideological reason underpinning the way that the system developed. Indeed, it is interesting to note here that R.H. Tawney, a committed socialist and the advocate of a full and democratic participation in higher education was a part of the Oxford liberal establishment and always remained part of a network of friends and Balliol intellectuals which included Moberley, as well as Lindsay, Temple and Beveridge (Taylor and Steele: 2011: 41), suggesting that perhaps the colonisation of the rest of the system by Oxbridge has not necessarily always been a bad thing, as neither has the relationship of the establishment and state to English higher education, an argument is further developed at the end of this chapter.

The relationship between state and university only really changed when the possibilities for an expanded higher education system became a possibility after 1945, when Atlee's Labour administration, elected on a landslide majority, recognised their importance in aiding Britain's recovery from the devastation of the Second World War. As well as the practicalities of rebuilding the nation there were also the commitments of the post-war settlement to be satisfied. The commitment of Atlee's government is clear in the title of the Labour manifesto *Let us Face the Future*. Moreover, the influence and the political commitment and ethos of men like R.H Tawney was also crucial in the development of universities by the Labour government in England after 1945 and thus there was a strong social democratic principle underpinning higher education then (Taylor and Steele: 2011; Steele and Taylor: 2008).

The Beveridge Report (1942), which provided the blueprint for the creation of the welfare state, helped to construct the collective notion that after the sacrifices of the Second World War and indeed, the inequalities of the pre-war depression, a new and fairer society could be built. A 'New Jerusalem'<sup>144</sup> as it was termed. The opportunities for participation in higher education were to be widened then, as soldiers, amongst others, who had been instrumental in Labour's victory, returned from war and demanded a university education (Neild: 2012; 86). Universities were held in high regard at this time<sup>145</sup> and the CVCP were optimistic about the future and indeed, enthusiastic as the needs of government and society coincided with their own. Thus, the relationship of universities to the state began to change during this period and a movement towards a mass model of higher education began, however slowly, from 1945, when a series of government commissioned reports from McNair (1944), Goodenough, (1944) Percy (1945) Barlow (1946) and Clapham (1946), (these were essentially manpower planning reports on the how science, technology, the social sciences and medicine could be increased and supported by government)<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> See Porter (1995) for re-assessment of Atlee and the policies of Labour in a post-war reconstruction Britain. See also Silburn (1991: 79-80) for discussion on Beveridge and alternative interpretations of the post-war consensus, particularly Barnett (1986) who 'denounces Beveridge in a singularly acrimonious fashion as the epitome of the "New Jerusalem Evangelists" who (in Barnett's view) helped to channel post-war energy and resources into doomed social goals, rather than into economic and industrial regeneration'. An alternative argument put forward by Marxists, is that the introduction of the welfare state was merely a sop to social democrats and thus simply an interlude of capitalism. See Hay (1994) for discussion on competing ideological explanations for post-war consensus.

<sup>145</sup> See Carswell (1985:2-3) who states that up until the end of the Second World War, universities did not occupy a large place in the national consciousness of the nation for the whole. The great change in the size and importance of the universities was largely the work of those who attended them in the decade before the war and their young teachers. Carswell points to Keynes, Namier, Leavis, Eddington, Tolkien and many others to show the intensity of activity in what were small but lively universities in the 1930s. Indeed, he argues that the smallness of the university environment was crucial in forming young minds; it was more influential because of it and this was where the values of the university and of life were acquired and that this was important for what happened later [in higher education policy]. Citing other, outside contingent influences, Carswell lists the War itself, the influx of already highly qualified refugees, products of the massive German university expansion which he suggests moved British universities into an international dimension replacing the former imperial role. See also Carswell (1985: 10-15) for description of how the UGC evolved from 1919 to 1961, in particular, how the UGC became the biggest source of revenue from 1946 and that the *quid pro quo* was an agreement that the universities would respond to the national need (1985:14, paragraph 3) if required to do so, described by Carswell as a 'quiet measure of nationalisation'. See also Shattock (2013: 17)

<sup>146</sup> The Barlow and Percy reports advocated the rapid expansion of scientific and technological higher education, including the creation of new technological universities. (Taylor and Steele: 2011: 79). The McNair Report investigated current teaching and teacher training requirements (Morrish: 1970; 138).

recommended expansion requiring direct state intervention in terms of funding and design. Through this the potential of the post-war contribution of the university to national success was recognised and in indeed, this had been planned for by the war time coalition government for in terms of its post-war social reforms and the expenditure required agreed by the treasury (Neild: 2012; 83). Thus there was a public demand which corresponded to the then predicted national requirements, in teaching, medicine and the professions. The vocational roles served by the social sciences could of course be provided by the universities. Crucially, the 1944 Education Act also made the expansion of higher education inevitable, as social mobility ('the trend' see Beloff: 1968; 21) was expected to increase as a consequence of the expansion of secondary education (Scott, 1984; Shattock, 1996, 2012). R.A. Butler proclaimed when introducing the act that 'education should be available to all' (see introduction in, Lowe: 1988). Taylor and Steele (2011: 79) state that there were three main themes in Labour policy on the expansion of the universities although the government's main focus was on education. These three themes were science, technology and expansion, access or – rather, participation. Baldwin (1990: 3) cites T.H. Marshall's thesis that the dawn of the welfare state in Britain under the Labour government ushered in a new epoch with the concept of citizenship as its keystone. Baldwin (1990: 3) cites Marshall as stating that 'full membership of a community' is premised on a kind of 'basic human equality' and that he divided citizenship into three basic components: civil, political and social<sup>147</sup>. Thus it can be argued that Labour government policy was geared to making education and higher education an integral part of a new society and in this way the liberal humanist values which underpin the educational ethos merge with the utilitarian and social and political needs and desires of society constructing the possibility, in principle at least, of

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The Clapham Report (as part of the reorganisation of the curriculum and a plan for a national system of education with social sciences at its heart which Tawney strongly supported and promoted) looked at funding and support for the social sciences (See Taylor and Steele: 2011; 39-40). The Goodenough Report was part of the visionary plan for a national system of health care and looked at the requirements for medical education recommending amongst other things that teaching hospitals had a major role to play but moreover that it should be (Waddington: 2003: 280-2). See also Porter (1997) for argument that the social sciences are required as part of the social planning for a healthy society.

<sup>147</sup> See Marshall (2006: 30).

the active participation and involvement of the community in education and, in political discussion: a New Jerusalem indeed. The Atlee Labour government was replaced by a Churchill-led Conservative administration in 1951-55, followed by the Conservative administrations of Eden 1955-57, Macmillan 1957- 63 and Douglas Home 1963 then replaced by Harold Wilson's Labour administration in 1964. During this period, as discussed below shortly, governments across the political spectrum were keen promoters of the expansion of higher education and soliloquised about its virtues.

The main expansion of the higher education sector post-war took place in the provinces, in the university colleges of Nottingham, Southampton, Hull, Exeter and Leicester<sup>148</sup>, which became independent in 1957. The University College of North Staffordshire at Keele, under Oxford influence was established in 1949 (Halsey: 1992: 64-65). The college was to become the University of Keele in 1962 and established the model for the next generation of universities. Taylor and Steele (2011: 43-4) state that although the founding of this university was not a formally part of Labour policy it was in a sense that it was the major contribution of the Atlee government to the future of universities in England. Moreover, that Keele represented the bridge between Benjamin Jowett's nineteenth-century project of philosophic idealism and social obligation at Balliol College and the politics of Alexander Lindsay<sup>149</sup>, a Labour politician and prime mover along with R.H. Tawney behind the creation of Keele. Taylor and Steele (2011: 43-4) state that 'Organizationally too, as recognised in the UGC's quinquennial report of 1952, Keele broke new ground in displaying important experimental elements for the new era in higher education'. They go on to say that this had an important legacy for the new 'Plateglass'<sup>150</sup> universities. Keele's establishment was followed by the foundation of the new 'Robbin's' universities of the 1960s. These were

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<sup>148</sup> Along with Reading these younger civics were sometimes known as 'whitetail'. Whitetail is epithet of John Osborne's Jimmy Porter (Beloff: 1968; 19)

<sup>149</sup> A.D. Lindsay had been a tutor in the pioneering tutorial classes established at North Staffordshire College by the WEA and Oxford. See Taylor and Steele (2011: 44) who state that he was probably one of Labour's most important thinkers about education combining the idealist tradition with a commitment to social purpose and had a special concern for adult education.

<sup>150</sup> The term 'plateglass' stems from the fact that unlike the older redbricks, the new universities were often built from steel and concrete with large expanses of glass windows and doors (Collyer: 2012; 56).

Warwick, Exeter, Sussex, Essex, Kent, East Anglia and York. As Scott (1984) argues, that together with the existing civics, this established or, entrenched the research culture and moved universities away from ‘pedagogic’ to ‘intellectual’ institutions. The new universities had a new outlook and were situated on green field sites with halls of residence attached. These were campus universities then, and different from the civics which had grown into the heart of their home cities. However, and paradoxically, this is similar to the conception (1943) Truscot<sup>151</sup> argued for in ‘*RedBrick University*’. That is, they were established largely on green field sites and attempted to continue the tradition of residential experience established by the ancients (Furlong and Cartmel: 2009; 14). Powell and Dayson (2013: 145) state that the new universities, in contrast to the civics, were created as a response to a national policy response but soon assumed their own identity. In this sense they complemented the civics and in the way that they maintained the culture of academic disinterested observers. Unlike the civics they were detached from their location. Powell and Dayson (2013: 145) argue that because of this and their greater concentration on the liberal arts they were in many respects less local than the civics, (they were removed because of a lack of vocation and utilitarian subjects) but however that they resisted the temptation to pursue a purely academic path and some opened engineering and physical science departments. Beloff (1968: 20) states that Keele’s austere and visionary character had represented the spirit of post-war socialist Britain, as the self-confident and colourful character of the Plateglass universities reflected the spirit of the high MacMillan age.

Clark (1995:68) states that, the most noted of the new set of institutions was Sussex and that ‘the Plateglass university ideal, expressed in *The Idea of a New University: an experiment in Sussex*, a collection of essays written by the new faculty, was a match for the traditional ideal in its focus on intense, high-quality undergraduate instruction in a

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<sup>151</sup> See Carswell (1985:3) who cites *Rebrick University* by Truscot (1943: 16) which he describes as an eloquent plea for the civics ‘which are all very much the same type - a type which if it can be modified in ways shortly to be suggested, will probably come to dominate English university education in centuries to come. Their foundation is due to local effort; their endowments come largely from local pockets; they are aided by grants from local municipal activities; and their students, though to a slowly decreasing extent, are drawn from local areas’.

residential environment'. Indeed, as the title makes clear *The Idea of a New University*: *an experiment in Sussex*, presented itself as a new type of university, committed to the new 'interdisciplinarity'. This would then allow new ways of seeing a new and ever increasingly changing world which required 'new maps for learning'. In fact, a reading of Daiche's (1970) book which describes its commitment to the pedagogic style based on the experience of Oxford can give the impression that Sussex was, in some senses, organised on a more traditional basis. The founding vice-chancellor of Sussex, John Fulton and its best known incumbent, Asa Briggs, were both Oxford men but had worked in the civics. Indeed, at the time of Sussex's creation this orientation led to Sussex being described, perhaps rather unkindly, as 'Balliol-by-Sea' (Shattock: 2012; 52.) by the Times newspaper (Beloff: 1968; 40). However, Beloff's 1968 account of the creation and development of the Plateglass universities and specifically of Sussex tells us another story entirely. Beloff (1968: 38) quotes a Gulbenkian educational conference scribe who described the freedom of the new universities as 'An Act of redefinition on a scale hitherto unparalleled in British higher education'. Beloff (1968: 28) makes a similar point stating that they were the planned children of government policy but that they were in Lord Fulton's phrase 'born free'. And he goes on to say that if there were to be experiments the 'apron-strings philosophy was outdated' (*ibid*). The new universities were given degree awarding powers from the start although standards were overseen by Academic Planning Boards. Beloff (1968: 39) describes the new map of learning as the 'redrawing of boundaries between old subjects and in many cases their abolition'. Moreover, and as Powell and Dayson (2013: 145) point out, there was an emphasis on the liberal arts (Beloff: 1968; 39), however, there was major thrust in the social sciences especially in sociology which matched the fastest growing occupations, administration, education, and social welfare etc. (Beloff: 1968; 40). Beloff (1968: 23) points out that the Robbins Report suggested that a new type of graduate would be needed in the future. Ones versed in the social sciences and humanities as well as science and technology to meet the needs of town planning or operational research. Beloff states that 'it was presumed ... a world without the humanities might be a new world but not a brave



new world'. There was a move away from the traditional syllabus too, particularly at Sussex, where Beloff tells us (1968: 42) that Professor Daiches deplored the prevalence of such esoteric thesis subjects as 'Jane Austen's use of the comma' hoping that the mating of sociology and literature would breed a richer scholarship'. Beloff (1968; 43) goes on to say that 'the syllabuses of Sussex and Kent, the blueprints of East Anglia and Warwick, reveal a view of law as a dynamic social force not a static *objet trouvé*. Beloff is pointing here to a distinction, between the older universities and their *vis inertia* as he puts it, and the desire of those in the new universities who felt themselves in a new age, to actively engage with their subjects and treat them as force for social change and not simply as an aesthetic or esoteric object useful for the development of the mind. And Sussex in particular represented this new thinking and use of comparative study. Although not always representative of society in its intake (See Beloff: 1968; 80), this institution was the figurehead of a new wave of new universities, full of contradictions (political radicalism whilst reflective of modern society and the establishment) but dynamic and capturing the *zeitgeist* of modern Britain.

In fact, and almost as an aside, the seven universities created in the 1960s and known now as the 'Robbins universities' were in fact part of an expansion made possible by Sir Keith Murray, Chairman of the UGC from 1953-63 (Carswell: 1985; 18). However, these were new universities, and were perhaps made possible by the inter-war years debates of Truscot<sup>152</sup> and others, a *zeitgeist* which carried through so strongly to Robbins, that although the six universities he proposed, but which never came to fruition (Howson: 2011; 894) the seven that did are still associated with him, and indeed, are eponymous with him. In 1968 Michael Beloff (1968: 15) stated that 'in terms of national consciousness this was the greatest single expansion of higher education that England had ever known'. Neild (2012: 88) states that 'In the 1950s and the 1960s the growth of the universities was driven forward in different ways by two men of power from the academic world, Lord Murray and Lord

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<sup>152</sup> See Truscot (1944) and *Redbrick University* which can arguably be read in part as an early version of the Robbins Report. In terms of administration, Truscot's plea to replicate the civics was fulfilled in the recommendations of the Robbins Report. i.e. and as Carswell (1985; 39) states: 'the existing pattern of court, council senate and Vice-Chancellor dividing authority between them was confidently recommended'.

Robbins. The first operated quietly within the machine and the second bombarded the body politic with one of the great state papers of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century'. Neild (2012) goes on to say that passages from the Robbins Report are a reminder of the political values: 'They are imbued with belief in the duty and power of state to improve society; and they take for granted the nation will willingly countenance a doubling or more of expenditure on higher education' (Neild: 2012; 90). Neild also goes on to say that although Robbins was a socialist in his youth these were not the sentiments of a socialist because he was by then a liberal Conservative appointed by a Conservative government, and that 'the members of his commission were representative of the great and the good of the period' (Neild: 2012; 90). In other words, there were strong connections in evidence then between the establishment, the state, and the academy and thus a strong influence from the universities, particularly Oxbridge on policy in higher education. However, there are alternative explanations for the expansion of higher education during this period in England, that is, and as King and Nash (2001) argue, that the idealistic focus on higher education by politicians and others was merely a façade and hid the real reason which was the contribution that universities could make to the economy. In fact, Neild (2012: 89), quoting Rüegg (2011) states that during the 'golden age'<sup>153</sup> for universities 1945 – 1969, competition with other nations was a primary driver for expansion and government funding. This was competition in the sense that other European countries were increasing their university places<sup>154</sup>, and because of the necessity to increase competitiveness in the industrial, scientific and technological arenas vis-a-vis the United States and the Soviet Union. Indeed, Neild (2012: 89) goes on to say that 'three arguments were commonly made for increasing expenditure on universities: the life enriching qualities of education and scholarship; the desire to increase social justice by

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<sup>153</sup> In fact Beloff (See: 1968; 21) argues that there had been a period of consolidation and that there was reluctance by government to expand universities any further and cites the ten CATs (colleges of advanced technology) restricted to awarding only diplomas until the Robbins Report 1963 as evidence of this. However, Beloff states that this reluctance went from 'consolidation to galloping expansion'. He explains this by reference to the 'mathematical equations' of government based on the 'trend', educational demand and the 'bulge', the increase in birth rate.

<sup>154</sup> See Beloff (1968: 23) who cites UNESCO chart of 1957 to show that only Ireland, Turkey and Norway had fewer university places than Britain.

widening access to university education; and the need to expand the physical sciences for the sake of the nations's military and industrial strength'. He goes on to say that 'we cannot know the relative importance of these' and that all we can say is that the rival political parties backed it enthusiastically and engaged in 'what one might call consensual competition, arguing about modalities rather than ends'. The discussion on the ends that politicians direct higher education to is taken up again immediately in the next chapter, when a critical discourse analysis examines government policy beginning with the Robbins Report itself.

## **Conclusion**

However, what we can conclude from the discussion in the latter section of this chapter, is that from 1945 through to the creation of the Robbins's universities there was a climate of not just social reform but of political change and social reorganisation connected to, or perhaps more accurately, built on the philosophy that education is key to equality, citizenship thus active participation in society and that the right thing to do is to extend it (Beloff: 1968; 24). There was also a climate of change in the way that knowledge could be acquired through learning and used for wider societal purposes, as well as the belief that it was valuable in its own right. The notion of equality and citizenship is particularly clearly expressed in Labour's post-war policy on higher education, an expression which continued for example, in the establishment of Keele in the late 1950's and indeed in the 'Robbins' universities in the early 1960s under different political administrations. And it can also be said that this philosophy was shared by the main political parties and that despite the other main driver for the expansion of higher education, the exigency of competition in the international arena, that the furthering of the human cause was also a principle underpinning the investment in universities, although the literature surveyed here suggests the emancipatory philosophy was becoming subordinated or at least was secondary to the liberal and utilitarian philosophies of higher education. The question which follows from this state of affairs is this. When do the economic considerations of the state completely override human interests? That is to say, when does the discourse of excellence become completely

eclipsed by the language of competition in the public sphere? The following chapter seeks to provide an answer to this.

## Chapter five

Thus the purpose of this next chapter is to make a critical discourse analysis of government policy in English higher education post-1945 beginning with the Robbins Report 1963 which as discussed in the previous chapter is considered to be a seminal moment in English higher education. In the course of this, the chapter charts the changes in political administrations and accompanying shifts in policy, for example under the Harold Wilson Labour government (1964-70) and Anthony Crosland's tenure as Secretary of State for Education (1965-70), to policy under the Conservative government of Edward Heath (1970 -74), the Labour governments of Harold Wilson (1974-6) and James Callaghan (1976-79, the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and John Major (1990-97), the Labour Governments of Tony Blair (1997-2007) and Gordon Brown (2007-2010) to the Coalition Government headed by David Cameron today (2010 - present). However, the chapter argues that there are three important signposts for the direction of policy in English higher education in the latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, and so it makes a detailed critical policy analysis of these. Those signposts are firstly, the Robbins Report, secondly, the Dearing Report and thirdly, the Browne Report and subsequent White Paper<sup>155</sup> (BIS: 2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*. The chapter will argue that these reports indicate, in the first instance, that higher education was seen by government as a public and social good as well as an economic driver, in the second that these ideals were losing ground to an increasing instrumentalism by government and in the third, that an inversion of the notion of the public good was attempted by the state to make higher education a private individual matter and an economic instrument (Callender: 2013; 154; Callender and Scott: 2013; 7)<sup>156</sup>. There is of course a lot to say about what happened in the period covering these reports, a time-frame

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<sup>155</sup> See Barnett (2013: 78-9) who argues that the language of the White Paper, which emphasises the transferability of a university degree to the labour market, reduces higher education as a public discourse to its superficial characteristics and thus its transformational potential is lost from view.

<sup>156</sup> See Taylor, Rizvi *et al.* (1997) for discussion on how education sees itself at the centre of struggle between instrumental state policy interventions and those who see its potential for human emancipation.

which spans over 50 years and which connects two centuries and thus it will not be possible here to cover all of this. However, the chapter pays special attention to landmarks in government policy and important political interventions in English higher education for example, in the late 1970s and during the 1980s under the Conservative administration of Margaret Thatcher. This is also argued to be the period which marks a shift in the relationship between state and university and a watershed in the administration and governance of higher education, indeed, a period in which competition is argued to have been embedded in the English university.

If the language of higher education and the institution of the university are accepted as being discourses, that is, social practices which are structured to communicate and express certain ideas and values, which, as argued above, convey the ideas of intellectuals and often reflect the ideals of wider society, but moreover, are reflective of the state's position, that is, of government policy, then we can go further and say that the language of government policy (the policy discourse) not only reflects the state's values and ideas but helps to constructs ideas about higher education<sup>157</sup>. Taylor (2004: 3) states that 'CDA is particularly appropriate for critical policy analysis because it allows a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relations. CDA provides a framework for a systematic analysis - researchers can go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts work'<sup>158</sup>. Thus this chapter is also a critical analysis of the political discourses of the state and as such it is also a political discourse analysis which critically examines the ideological arguments put forward by the state in the delivery of its policy on higher education. Thus the chapter attempts to establish the wider

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<sup>157</sup> See Taylor (1997: 25) for discussion on different definitions of discourse and their application to critical policy analysis. In particular, see her discussion on Meutzenfeldt and Fairclough here.

<sup>158</sup> See: Taylor and Rizvi *et al.* (1997) for discussion on definition of 'policy' which as they point out is more complex than 'a statement of intent or action to carry a plan through' can do justice to. In particular, see Taylor and Rizvi *et al.* (1997: 33) for discussion on different types of policy, e.g. 'distributive' or 'redistributive' which refer to the distribution of resources, 'symbolic' and material which refer in the first case, to the commitment of implementing a policy and the clarity of its goals through making resources available by the organisation responsible, and the second might for example refer to an equal opportunity policy which is intended to be implemented or abided by, by those on the ground, so to speak. 'Deregulatory' policies are usually associated with an ideological commitment to minimal government or - to state intervention - often associated with the release of market forces.

meaning of state policy in English higher education and so what it says about state policy aimed at wider society<sup>159</sup>.

So the first section of this chapter concentrates on the Robbins Report 1963 and leads to the creation of the polytechnics in 1968 under a Labour administration. This was an important juncture in terms of policy and for English higher education as it can be argued that this created the foundations, however unintended at the time, for the system we have now, although there were many significant events and policy interventions in between. Indeed, changes in political administration and economic crises which can also said to have had a profound effect on policy and to have shaped our higher education system today, changing the relationship of universities to the state and, transforming the public understanding of excellence. Indeed, in 1963 the Robbins Committee Report recommended the expansion of education as a public good, a democratic right and also recommended the incorporation of science and technology in an expansion of higher education into the universities. However, and instead, polytechnics firmly located in the public sector would be established in 1968 by Anthony Crosland. This is said to have constructed a normative metaphor for English higher education. That is to say, it created an understanding about English universities, in the sense that a binary system or ‘divide’ was perceived to exist in higher education and that perception related to the quality of the institution and also therefore, to where excellence was perceived to exist within the system and importantly, to whom it was available and at what level. That is, a difference in possibility and potential was

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<sup>159</sup> See Ball (1993) for a discussion on the difference between policy texts and discourses. The latter he argues are often the products of contestation and mediation, are not linear in an ideological sense or with regard to individual politicians, even of the same party, and are reinterpreted or even ignored in the micro setting. Policy discourses are far more abstract, ideological, practices geared at getting people to do and to think things. The paper also discusses the balance between the micro and macro analysis of policy, e.g. the difference between how individuals are affected in the institutional setting and the complex construction and original political aim or intention of the text (policy document or announcement). Ball (1993: 16) outlines three settings for policy: the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context (s) of practice. Henry (1993) challenges Ball’s notion of replacing the modernist theoretical project of abstract parsimony with a more post-modernist one of localised complexity and states that it is difficult to conceptualise notions like justice or equality without reference to a material social totality. See Delanty (2011) however, who argues that the ‘toolkit’ approach i.e. the incorporation of methods and theories from across the tradition of critical sociology, including macro and micro level approaches, strengthen critical theory’s claim to be a rigorous methodological form of social critique.

perceived to exist between the established universities and other HE institutions, which were seemingly geared towards different ends, and administered and governed differently and so perceived as different in their status and in autonomy – the polytechnics being under what was termed ‘social control’ and thus under effective control of the state through the proxy of the local authorities.

In making the decision to create the polytechnics, which Anthony Crosland outlined in 1965 in the Woolwich Speech<sup>160</sup>, (moderated at Lancaster) he arguably refuted the liberal expansionist view espoused by Robbins. That is to say, that instead of going forward with a plan which might have led to an early unification of the then higher education system, that is, as well as implementing Robbin’s plans for the Colleges of Advanced Technology (the CATS, created in the 1956 White Paper on Technical Education) to receive technological university status which would then have existed alongside the unimplemented ‘SISTERS’, Special Institutions for Scientific and Technological Education and Research proposed by Robbins, thus basing the system on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Crosland chose instead to criticise the hierarchical and autonomous nature of universities and to create the polytechnics. The universities existed, in his view, in splendid isolation (Scott: 1984; 152-189; Venables 1965; 16-29). Ironically, for a period at least, Crosland’s policy maintained if not in fact, constructed this very separation in higher education by the creation of the polytechnics. Indeed, he also stated in his speeches that ‘higher education’, that is, the polytechnics for that moment, at least, should be under ‘social control’ and that their use should be applicable to society. In this view he was supported by Sir Toby Weaver, Deputy Under-Secretary at the Department of Education and Science. Weaver was the adopted son of Stafford Cripps, the Labour war time coalition politician and later, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Indeed, Weaver was a committed educationalist and advocate of the public control of education for its applicability to societal concerns. And despite the seemingly aggressive stance of the state in Crosland’s political positioning on universities, (the story is of course more complex and nuanced), the creation of the polytechnics was not

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<sup>160</sup> See Carswell (1988:72) for key passage of Crosland’s Woolwich speech.



necessarily a bad thing and would, as this chapter will argue, lead, in a circuitous route, to the transformation of English higher education through the creation of a unitary system in 1992. Indeed, perhaps the latter was a seminal event in English higher education and one which was important in terms of policy as the creation of the Robbins universities were as an act of ‘national consciousness’ (*ibid*) and one that despite the policy aims underpinning it began the mass active participation in English higher education that we know now with all the very many issues that has brought to the fore, both good and bad.

### **The Robbins Report: the philosophy of higher education**

The philosophy preceding and underpinning the Robbins Report and indeed, the spirit of the age were discussed to an extent in the previous chapter. The argument there was that excellence, the emancipatory belief in higher education, in part drove the expansion of universities and that this was realised by the social democratic and liberal policies of government, individual politicians and civil servants. Indeed, literature shows that Robbins himself was driven by strong liberal values<sup>iv</sup>, but what of the Committee and its ethos, what did it believe in? How did it position itself in that moment of history? Scott (1984: 122) states that ‘The historical perspective of the Robbins Report is still impressive. The committee saw its responsibility in the context of an unfolding education revolution that reached back at least to 1870’. Indeed, they viewed their work as a continuation of that and the Education Acts of 1902 and 1944 and 1945 (The Robbins Report: 1963; 11). A guiding ethos of the Report was therefore, the belief in the establishment of a universal or, national system of education; in short, equality of opportunity in education. Carswell (1985: 32) in describing the *Picture of a Committee* argues that the influence of Sir Phillip Morris, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol and one of the eleven members<sup>161</sup> of the Committee

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<sup>161</sup> See Carswell (1985: 31) where it is stated that three seats on the Committee were occupied by men from the world of industry, including R. B. Southall who had been with B.P. in South Wales where he was Vice-Chancellor of the University College Swansea, but however, that their voices were ‘little heard’ (there were eleven members of the Committee in all, not including the Chaiman). One member of the Committee, Sir Edward Herbert, died before the completion of the Report. Carswell (1985:29) states that ‘He was a ship-builder and bank director of distinction, and an engineer by training who had been director-general of prefabrication during the War. He was the oldest member of the Committee and, in the pattern of such compositions, represented the employing side of industry. A

was crucial in this regard. Carswell describes Morris as one of the great men of the Atlee years, chairman of numerous bodies concerned with health, education and broadcasting and from 1955-8 Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principles (CVCP). Carswell says this about the man. ‘He was at heart a unifier, above all in education, which he saw as moving inexorably towards a coordinated, if indirectly administered publicly supported system. No member of the committee, not even the Chairman had more influence over the final emphasis of the Report: indeed it could almost be said that he was its architect’. However, in terms of the shape and impact of the Report, Claus Moser of the LSE and the head of the Committee research team is said by Carswell (1985:29) to have ‘exercised much the greatest influence’. Moser (1988: 5 ) however, whilst acknowledging that he is writing partly through Robbin’s eyes, states that while the strength and weaknesses of the Committee have been evaluated by Carswell in his excellent book, it was in fact Robbins who dominated the Committee. Similarly, O’Brien (1988: 18-19, 73) states that to anyone reading the voluminous minutes of evidence that ‘the Chairman took an absolutely central role in proceedings and that he wrote at least part of the Report’ and indeed, that: ‘His natural egalitarianism is stamped on the Report, and one of the things of which he was most proud in this harmonious exercise was the ‘pool of ability’ demonstration’ (O’Brien: 1988; 19)<sup>162</sup>. However, Carswell does go on to attribute this historical importance to the Report:

The Robbins Report of October 1963 appeared at a critical moment in the history of public opinion and is one of the great state papers of this century, and possibly the last of its line. Only the Beveridge Report of 1943 and the Poor Law Report of 1909 can compete with it for copiousness, cogency, coherence and historical influence. It contains memorable passages and is informed by a consistent intellectual attitude. It is extraordinary to think that the investigation on which it rested as well as the composition of the Report itself took less than two and a half years (Carswell: 1985: 38).

The chapter returns to the importance of public opinion in due course but continues now by setting out the principles on which the Committee based the Report. That is, the ‘aims of

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younger industrialist with engineering qualifications would have been of great advantage to the Committee’. In fact Robbins was himself at one time a director of B.P. See O’Brien (1988: 17).

<sup>162</sup>The term ‘pool of ability’ refers to one of the central statements of the Robbins Report, i.e. that there was an untapped pool of talent amongst young people within British society.

higher education’ or as the Report proceeds by asking the question: ‘To begin with aims and objectives - what purposes, what general social ends should be served by higher education?’ (Robbins Report: 1963; 6). Moser (1988: 5,6) sums up the basic principles of the Report which he states are much missed thus, stating ‘that what is striking is that the sum of the Report is much greater than its parts, by this I mean three things’:

First, the recommendations treated higher education as an integrated system, each part with its particular role. Secondly, they were all seen as contributing to four ideals for higher education: first, instruction for specific skills and vocations; second, teaching aimed to promote the general powers of the mind and to produce not more specialists but cultivated men and women; third, the advancement of learning; and fourth, the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship. I note that the recent government White Paper explicitly re-affirms these Robbins aims<sup>163</sup>.

Thirdly, and above all, the Report was inspired by the Committee's passionate belief in the importance of higher education for the nation's future and for enabling young people to develop their talents to the full. This commitment informed every paragraph of the report and explains its impact. It responded to the mood of the time, amongst the public, in government and within higher education. It was a commitment often missing in today's public debate and government pronouncements, though in my belief it remains as firm within universities, polytechnics and colleges as it was then (Moser: 1988; 6).

So Moser is arguing here that the philosophy underpinning the Report is of the greatest import and thus not the detail of the practical recommendations which set out to establish a unified ‘pattern’ of national higher education (this detail is set out here however in due course). Moreover, Moser is arguing here that the principle over-riding everything else in the Report was the commitment to the education of young people. It is often stated that the Robbins Report was ‘the last important statement on liberal education’ (Barnett: 1990; 11) or as Scott has argued it is one or both of the following: ‘it is either the finest expression of a liberal vision of higher education, the world we lost; the second that it provided the blueprint for Britain's modern system of higher education (Scott: 1988; 33). This chapter argues that it certainly achieved the latter – in principle at least - whilst arguing through a reinterpretation of the literature that the former view of Robbins as a ‘liberal vision’ of

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<sup>163</sup> Moser is referring to the White Paper of 1987: *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* which focused on widening participation and which is discussed later in this chapter during the critique of the Dearing Report.

society; the advancement of the private freedom of the individual through higher education courtesy of the state does not really do justice to the social democratic elements of the Report, even if these were implicit and even, unintended by the authors, although the literature suggests otherwise. Indeed, rather than ‘liberal’ here referring to a broad based university education and the commitment to the transmission of a common culture (much criticised since for obvious reasons: see Barnett: 1990: 95) and the construction of the idea of higher education in the public sphere as a public good, and indeed, through the ‘cultivation’ of the mind, the advancement of learning, a culture to aspire to, and thus the maintenance of an aesthetic realm within society, liberal can be argued here to refer to the development of the individual. Barnett (1990: 95), in pointing out that Robbins did not address the internal culture of higher education on either the institutional or student levels and that this was a striking omission, given that this was for Robbins, an essential ingredient of the development of universities, nonetheless argues (1990: 17, 18, 21) that liberal used in application to the development of the student represents the emancipatory element of higher education, in that it encourages the development of the student through critical inquiry and critical self-reflection. So although the Report speaks in abstractions and generalities with regard to a philosophy of higher education, and whilst stressing the importance of the autonomy of the university (it does not detail a pedagogic process<sup>164</sup>), it is clear about the importance of higher education in the development of young people and their talents.

Moreover, and drawing on an argument of this thesis that excellence in higher education relates to the concept of eudaimonia, that is, it is educative in the sense that it promotes a

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<sup>164</sup> In the absence of direct evidence from the participants, it is only really possible to surmise that Robbins and the other members of the Committee who were drawn from the universities based the idea of higher education presented in the Report on their own experience of teaching in the academy. Indeed, Carswell (1985: 50 states, in his *Critique of the Report*, after discussing the failure of the Committee to deal with the crucial issue of tenure, that ‘One final instance should be added, for it perhaps caused more difficulty than any other problem flowing from the Robbins Report. The university model they knew and understood exercised so strong an influence on the Chairman and the majority of the Committee that they had little sympathy for any other’. Carswell goes on to say all the other institutions covered in the report, e.g. teacher training colleges and CATs and their diversity of role and staffing was ignored in the wider cause of attempting to implement the goal of ‘autonomy’. The Committee also visited a number of foreign models in the USSR, the USA, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland and although finding things from which they could learn, with regards to the relationship with the state it saw nothing to envy Britain (Carswell: 1988; 38)

flourishing of the individual's attributes and dispositions through knowledge of the word and oneself, it can also be argued that Robbins contained a wider emancipatory message. Indeed, if the combination of the Report's aims are considered together, that is if we juxtaposition for example, the utilitarian need for 'the instruction for specific skills and vocations' (*ibid*) with the development of the individual with the aim of what can be argued as the promotion of a philosophy of higher education in society, then it is possible to argue that the intention of the Robbins Report was to forge 'the good society'. After all, the notion that higher education can promote 'common standards of citizenship', even in the context and course of the transmission of a common - and presumably - national culture, presupposes the active engagement of the individual within civil society if not also in fact, within the political sphere. This also of course presupposes some level of increasing equality in society<sup>165</sup>. Indeed, after talking about a common culture and common standards of citizenship the report goes on to say this: 'By this we do not mean the forcing of all individuality into a common mould: that would be the negation of higher education as we conceive it' (Robbins Report: 1963: 7; 28). And then the Report clarifies its position:

But we believe that it is a proper function of higher education, as of education in schools, to provide in partnership with the family that background of culture and social habit upon which a healthy society depends. This function, important at all times, is perhaps especially important in an age that has set for itself the ideal of equality of opportunity. It is not merely by providing places for students from all classes that this ideal will be achieved, but also by providing, in the atmosphere of the institutions in which the students live and work, influences that in some measure compensate for any inequalities of home background. These influences are not limited to the student population.

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<sup>165</sup> See Filmer (1997: 48-9-50) for discussion on the notions of citizenship and culture associated with various ideas of the university, e.g., Leavis and his argument for a continuation of the English cultural tradition, i.e., the meritocratically élite intellectual minority and the preservation of a high culture which although not antipathetic to industrial society as Filmer (1997: 49) states, Eliot argues, 'is related to the decline of the industrial spirit in England - 'a pre-Raphaelite neo-medievalism characteristic of late-nineteenth though in Britain and not unrelated to the physiocratic reaction to early modern European society'. Filmer goes on to state that the humanist idealism of this ethos of the university continues to penetrate debates about the ideas of the university. However, Filmer (*ibid*) goes on to point to another idea of the university, the nineteenth-century metropolitan university of London and its provincial colleges whose idea grew out of Bentham's founding of UCL and inevitably carried a utilitarian flavour with them. i.e. modern institutions that were appropriate to the conditions and concerns of a new industrial bourgeois society. The cultural ideal of these, the merging of the curriculum so that applied as well as the pure sciences were studied along-side the social sciences, political economy and the arts and humanities provoked an engagement with the traditional culture which was made public in the 'Two Cultures Debate' sparked by the exchanges between F.R. Leavis and C.P. Snow.

Universities and colleges have an important role to play in the general cultural life of the communities in which they are situated (Robbins Report: 1963: 7; 28)

So universities, that is the new universities which were about to engage with ‘new maps of learning’ and new and radical ways of thinking about the increasingly diverse world were to influence the cultural life of their host communities. It is possible to surmise then, that the Robbins Report intended universities to act as the extension of higher education in wider society and that this would create the culture of a learning society and thus an-ongoing development of society. Thus the jarring tone of the Report as heard through the notion of a ‘common culture’ perhaps begins to fade; the term of course suggests an unchanging and thus fixed social landscape that was acceptable, which Britain and the world were not of course in the early 1960s and which equally of course, the Report’s authors knew only too well themselves, suggesting as they do in the following extract, a remaking of the world through the development of the creative talents of ‘man’ (*sic*).

First, conceiving education as a means, we do not believe that modern societies can achieve their aims of economic growth and higher cultural standards without making the most of the talents of their citizens. This is obviously necessary if we are to compete with other highly developed countries in an era of rapid technological and social advance. But, even if there were not the spur of international standards, it would still be true that to realise the aspirations of a modern community as regards both wealth and culture a fully educated population is necessary.

But beyond that, education ministers intimately to ultimate ends, in developing man's capacity to understand, to contemplate and to create. And it is a characteristic of the aspirations of this age to feel that, where there is capacity to pursue such activities, there that capacity should be fostered. The good society desires equality of opportunity for its citizens to become not merely good producers but also good men and women (Robbins Report: 1963: 9; 32-3)

But what were the practical aims of a Report designed in part to implement this state of affairs, and did it succeed in getting these right and, importantly, did it foresee the future of higher education accurately. Moreover, did it lead to a system of higher education in which all who were able could participate whilst simultaneously gearing it to the needs of an increasingly technological and competitive economic world? The next section of writing addresses these questions.

### **The recommendations of the Report: success or failure?**

So the Robbins Report as Carswell (1988: 45) states, set out to increase the liberal enlargement of opportunity in British society through higher education, most notably for women and to set about the multiplication of scientific manpower in the service of 'future prosperity' and a system of autonomous institutions that would nonetheless operate in a collective plan. Before dealing with the issue of manpower and Robbins's attitude to this use of the university and indeed, how the notion of instrumentalism figured in Robbins's thinking, it is perhaps necessary to deal with the outcome of the practical recommendations of the Report. Specifically, the Report recommended that the colleges of advanced technology be given technological university status and it also recommended the creation of the 'SISTERS' Special Institutions for Scientific and Technological Education and Research and that teacher training colleges be federated with universities and it also contemplated the upgrading of some existing technical colleges. The purpose of this was to create a new unified 'pattern' of higher education. As stated earlier in this chapter, this was not to be because of policy interventions by a subsequent political administration. The Report did succeed in getting the CATs re-designated as technological universities but Crosland's intervention scuppered the rest. In his autobiography, Robbins (1971) discussed Crosland's Woolwich speech, his declaration of intent to create the polytechnics and his rejection of the creation of more universities. Robbins said this about the creation of a binary system.

What I do not understand was the ultimate philosophy inspiring the idea of the binary system – the eternal separation of two rival sectors. I could understand, even though I should deprecate, the idea of separation at the highest level of the technological and traditional universities – I should not expect the former long to remain content with the status as regards self-government different from the rest. But if this were contemplated, why authorize the transformation of the existing Colleges of Advanced Technology? For without them as the crown, so to speak, of the system, it was folly to imagine that the proposed polytechnics could ever reach parity of esteem. And why the eternal divorce? Our conception of the higher education system had not been one of wooden equality of institutions all round, but rather of a spectrum, divided at one point for administrative reasons, but in essence a continuum permitting, when occasion demanded it, transfer from one area to another (Robbins: 1971; 281-2).

After making this emphasis on the desirability of a diverse but interconnected system and pointing out the status that the CATs could have lent to the polytechnics, Robbins goes on to say that he did not believe that the binary system would stand up to the social and economic strains he believed it would create. Carswell perhaps helps us to understand Robbin's angst over the creation of the binary system and its in-built hierarchy when he says: 'The Robbins Report has as one of its most important principles a university world in which both competition and variation in power are in principle eliminated' (Carswell: 1988; 42).

Robbins however, goes on to list the achievement of the Report, including the re-designation of the CATs, the reform of the curricula and the governing structure of the Colleges of Education or teacher training colleges, (although he acknowledges that this was down in part to the newly created Department of Education and Science) the creation of a completely new Scottish university and the creation of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). And as O'Brien (*ibid*) has pointed out, Robbins was especially proud of 'establishing the existence of a far greater higher education potential than had been previously been generally acknowledged and in securing the recognition thereof as a commonly accepted basis of policy' (Robbins: 1971; 282). Thus Robbins is arguing here that his report created the principle that expansion in higher education had become an established policy because of the undoubted pool of talent amongst young people in the country. Indeed, and with regard to opportunity, the Report set out to allow for the increasing numbers of women in society wishing to take advantage of higher education. It was envisaged that there would be more women than men entering higher education in the coming years, however the projected numbers and thus those provided for these in the relevant subject areas of the arts and disciplines was incompetently handled, and in science and indeed, technology, the figures were simply incorrect. The Report planned for an equal split between the genders which took no account of the educational facts of the time. The Report failed to note the pattern of studies in schools which suggested that girls would increasingly fill the arts, social science and medicine. Carswell (1988:45) describes this misjudgement as constituting 'a mass deficiency' of the Report. Indeed, Carswell states that 'it is very important to remember that



‘maintenance of opportunity’ in the Robbins context did not mean that the size of the age-groups was the only determining factor. It meant maintenance of opportunity for those expected to reach qualifying level and seeking entrance, and was thus an academic as much as a social concept’ (Carswell: 1988; 42). Given the emphasis placed on statistical data by the Report the ‘deficiency’ is indeed a gross error and presents a significant contradiction in terms of the intellectual process of the Committee.

The other major criticism of the Report addresses funding. The Anderson Report of 1960 preceded the Robbins Report and made the decision ‘to finance tuition fees and student maintenance centrally, as an automatic right consequent on entry to higher education rather than be solely based on the judgment of local education authorities’ (Shattock: 2013: 21). Shattock goes on to argue that ‘The Robbins Committee, forecasting a growth in student numbers from 216,000 in 1962 to 558,000 in 1980-81, had a unique opportunity to offer recommendations as to how this expansion (which implied more than a doubling of the public expenditure bill) could be financed – but chose not to do so’ (Shattock: 2013; 21). Shattock (2013: 22) goes on to point out that the Treasury had raised concerns about how the system was to be paid for in the future. The Report accepted the recommendation that fees should rise by twenty per cent but be continued to be paid for by the state whilst arguing against loans, although conceding that these might have to be addressed later. Shattock states that the failure to deal with funding along with the Technical Education Act of 1956 which created the CATs, the standard bearers for the local authorities, which would go on to have financial control over the polytechnics, ‘had clear long-term financial implications’ (Shattock: 2013;22). In other words, it stored up trouble for the next 30 years with regard to control of the ‘publically controlled’ sector of higher education (the polytechnics) and for the future funding of the universities. An issue which is central to second half of this chapter as the Dearing and Browne Reports address exactly the latter. However, before proceeding to these a short summary of what are argued (Carswell: 1988; 38-52) also to be failings in Robbins Report are presented before this critical analysis of the Robbins Report is concluded. First, it is argued along with the failure to accurately forecast women’s studies

into the future, that medical studies and the future demands of the NHS were also left unaddressed or not provided for. Secondly, the issue of tenure was ignored, that is, the understanding that recruitment to an academic post should be otherwise for life was left untouched (Carswell: 1988; 49) also providing fertile ground for political intervention later. Finally, the balance between teaching and research was also an area of the Report which mismatched a well-intentioned philosophical approach to higher education with the available statistical evidence and practicalities of life. Staffing would be on the basis that every teacher would be engaged in research as a recognition of the importance of the proximity to new knowledge. However, the consequences for those engaged in research by the expansion of numbers was not addressed. Moreover, no account was taken with regard to where the most important areas of research were needed or, how the popularity of certain subjects may affect numbers and so course sizes, viability and so on (Carswell: 1988; 40). Likewise, and apart from heavy hints (Carswell: 1988; 39) that Oxford, Cambridge and London were in need of administrative reform, no thought was taken as to the problems of managing large institutions with thousands of employees and students.

So in summing up the failure of some aspects of the Report, it is reasonable to argue that the implementation of the Report with regard to a unified system was less than perfect due to later political interventions and that there were problems stored up for the future by a lack of forethought. However, the Report was momentous in that it gave official expression to not simply a political, but a public desire to see higher education opened up to opportunity. Indeed, Carswell states that the Report caught the mood of the time. It was right in many of its perceptions. Its case for a rapid increase in higher education on demographic, economic and social grounds was undeniable, especially in the face of <sup>166</sup>‘More means worse’, a hopeless backward-looking slogan. The public expectations of the Report were extremely high then, and the Report was accepted by the Conservative administration facing a general election and campaigning with the slogan ‘*The Modernisation of Britain*’ readily accepted the Report

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<sup>166</sup> The Times ran an article criticising the proposed expansion of higher education on the grounds that universities would suffer deterioration in quality because of their expansion (Robbins: 1971: 278).

within a day of its publication, leaving behind and forgetting as Carswell (1988: 51) states its ‘rough edges’. In summing up this section on Robbins it is worth revisiting the words of Moser cited earlier. He said that ‘... .. above all, the Report was inspired by the Committee's passionate belief in the importance of higher education for the nation's future and for enabling young people to develop their talents to the full. This commitment informed every paragraph of the report and explains its impact. It responded to the mood of the time, amongst the public, in government and within higher education. ... ..’ (Moser: 1988; 6). Indeed, and in emphasising the point O’Brien (1988: 74) states ‘Robbins position on universities and their expansion rested on a number of points of departure. The first was a belief in the value of public discussion<sup>167</sup>. O’Brien goes on to explain that this might seem obvious but in a field where policy decisions have been taken by ministers and civil servants in private, often in the face of public ignorance it is a point worth making. Second, O’Brien argues that Robbins was in fact highly sceptical about the possibilities for manpower planning. He did not believe except for a few limited categories of public employees that it could be successful and that forecasting price and technical advances was impossible. Moreover, and crucially, O’Brien states that Robbins saw dangers for human freedom in manpower planning – even implications in the direction of labour.

These two principles – in a sense, both are aspects of welfare being self-perceived – led to the fundamental principle that, which the Committee endorsed, of open provision of places according to the demand for them. Rather than manpower planning, individuals were to choose occupations on the basis of their own evaluations of the net benefits; and with open public discussion it would be much easier for individuals to appreciate the implications of their choice. Moreover, this approach was in accord with the emphasis upon equality of opportunity which, as noted in the previous chapter<sup>168</sup>, was a welfare judgement to which Robbins attached considerable importance (O’Brien: 1988; 74).

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<sup>167</sup> See Scott (2013: 36) for discussion on the public nature of the debate undertaken by the Robbins Committee which included soliciting views and at public sessions.

<sup>168</sup> See O’Brien (1988: 51-73) for chapter *Economic Welfare* which describes in detail Robbins’ utilitarianism. O’Brien states that Robbins considered the market to be the most efficient method of ensuring economic welfare he did not rule out a significant role for the state, which could also redistribute income and wealth but was luke-warm about progressive taxation and a powerful and effective critic of socialism. ‘Taking together Robbins’ writing on economic welfare, they represent a restatement of the Classical and Utilitarian tradition applied to twentieth century problems’.

So although explicitly rejecting social democratic policies to ameliorate society and as O'Brien (1988: 63) states, refusing to accept that Bentham's greatest happiness principle could lead to collectivism, Robbin's vision of higher education and his plan for young people in particular took a conception of freedom which separated the university from the labour market by allowing individuals to decide what the benefits of a particular education were to them, not necessarily to the state and its future economic prosperity or indeed their own, unless of course they chose this, but what they wanted from it, after due thought following from public discussion on the matter. In sum, it is possible to say that despite its failings and its propensity to set political and economic traps for the future, the Robbins Report provided a philosophical blueprint for the future of higher education, in that it set out the principle that higher education was a cultural as well as a public and individual good and that access to it should be open to all those that can attain it, regardless of the ends to which it is put. As Scott states, although the Report's detailed policy prescriptions were largely ignored 'Robbin's overall endorsement of student expansion had a powerful influence on higher education's future' (Scott: 2013: 37). Indeed, and drawing on the discussions of eudaimonia and excellence earlier in this thesis, it is possible to argue that it is this conception of higher education that results in happiness for the many and thus, society.

### **After Robbins**

The Robbins Report was accepted readily by the Conservative administration of Douglas Home but however, as discussed above, its recommendations for the expansion of the universities were not acted upon and indeed, they were considerably deviated from with regard to the creation of the polytechnics. This policy decision was taken under the Labour administration of Harold Wilson which had campaigned on the ideal of the white-hot mid-century technological revolution, an ideal which Filmer (1997:50) argues was implicit in some of the recommendations of the Robbins Report. For example, the upgrading of the colleges of advanced technology to university status. These sought, as Filmer states, to 'consolidate the ideal of the metropolitan university by complementing their focus on technology with a rational scientific humanism, usually by creating departments of social

science' (Filmer: 1997; 50). The creation of the new Robbins' universities on new green-field sites had of course already been established before the Report and these and particularly the civic universities accounted for the increase in expansion and in student numbers in the years after, negating the need for the creation of Robbins' six new universities. The next big change to universities would come with the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992 which created the unitary system by allowing the polytechnics to assume university status (Scott: 1997: 40). However, before this, English universities were to go through what can be reasonably be described as troubled times.

The political administration of Margaret Thatcher marked a turning point in the philosophical conception of what society should look like and indeed, how it should be ordered as well as signalling a change in the relationship between the university and state. The market and individualism was now the way forward, the idea of a state planned and collectively organised society was over, and despite the obvious differences between the parties, (for example, spending on social protection) Tony Blair and New Labour who would arrive in office in 1997 after 18 years of Conservative rule, brought these new ideas about society, the individual, higher education and the economy to the fore in the Dearing Report on higher education. Scott (2013) argues that a new model of policy formation emerged in the mid-1980s under the Conservatives and was developed by the Blair government from 1997. As set out in the introduction to the thesis, this model entails a heightened degree of ideological dogmatism which reflects the decay of and (or) replaces the post-war settlement. If the latter, this is achieved through the ideology of neoliberalism. Moreover, Scott (2013:34) argues that unlike the twentieth century's more rationalist models of policy informed by the 'grand narrative inquiries' like Robbins, it reflects a distrust of traditional forms of professional expertise and demands instant results and is about presentation and short-term political agendas and has difficulty in being implemented partly because of the greater pressures of modern politics which are subject to the immediate and intense scrutiny of the modern world of multi-media coverage. This model of policy also differs from the grand narrative inquiries in that it emphasises the subordination of higher education to wider

policies of innovation, industry and employment, and makes more detailed intrusions into higher education in terms of better management and improved accountability (Scott: 2013; 34). This policy model is discussed more below shortly, in the context of a critique of the Dearing Report which recommended just this, but which in fact modelled itself on the Robbins Report (NCIHE: 1987: 2; 2.2: Scott: 2013; 35).

So in presenting a brief historical background to Dearing now, in 1979 a Conservative administration headed by Margaret Thatcher came to power in a period of recession and major political, social and cultural upheaval<sup>169</sup>. Indeed, this period should be viewed in political and economic context as a movement to greater government involvement in higher education, and education more generally. This greater state intervention can be argued to have begun following the first oil crisis or ‘shock’ of 1974 which led to a major recession. It is argued that in times of economic crisis that education is seen as the problem causing the ills of society and its instabilities<sup>170</sup> and yet at the same time it is viewed as the panacea for remedying these by providing human capital (Ball: 2007; Brown and Halsey *et al.*: 1997). There had been political frustration if not suspicion for some time over the nature of the ‘secret garden’ in schools<sup>171</sup>. That is to say, politicians had expressed concern over their lack of knowledge with regard to what was being taught in schools given the lack of an official state curriculum, thereby suggesting that education be aligned to wider social purposes if it was not already and in the process questioning the independence of public service professionals (Foster and Wilding: 2000; 145). This political concern was alluded to by James Callaghan in what is known as the Ruskin Speech in 1976, in which the then prime minister indicated a tightening of the connection between education and government and the

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<sup>169</sup> See Dorling (2014c) who in discussing the rise of inequality which began to increase again in the 1970s argues that in the 1970s and early 1980s “a choice was made in the US and to a lesser extent to let inequality rip. In the UK this was driven by the dominance of predominantly a large group of Conservative voters, some of whom reaped a short-term benefit, the rest being convinced [by the ideological arguments of neoliberalism] that there was no alternative to the ‘global race’”

<sup>170</sup> See Tight (2010: 109-110) who while discussing the myth and memory of a ‘golden age’ in higher education points to the damage that the student protests of the late 1960s and early 1960s had on the public standing and reputation and academe along with a growing public perception that universities were causing pressure on the public finances in times of economic crisis.

<sup>171</sup> The phrase ‘the secret garden’ was first used by Conservative minister for education, David Eccles in 1960.

economic requirements of society. The speech is widely regarded as having begun 'The Great Debate' about the nature and purpose of public education in society and the need to direct the skills education is said to be able to provide to the economy.

Coupled with this, the economic crises of the 1970s and early 1980s and the added pressures of globalization heralded the end of the post-war consensus and led to a questioning of the assumptions underpinning the creation of the welfare state, for example, the idea of full-employment and the notion of universal welfare provision (UWP) and indeed, the very notion of the socialization of the ownership of the means of production (Brown and Halsey, *et al.*: 1997; 5-6). There was also a technological change in the global economy. The post-Fordist or post-industrial age marked a shift in the value of resources and a dramatic change in the mode of production so that one of most the valuable commodities became 'information technology', commonly referred to as 'knowledge' (Scott: 1997; 42) and also crucially, 'knowledge' defined as the type of high-level skills, scientific advances and innovation that higher education can provide, and this is said to have created changes in employment, ways of behaviour – acting, and life-styles. This represented a major economic and cultural transformation, then, especially in western societies. Scott (1997: 42) however, also argues that in life under post-Fordism changes in the means of accumulation are subordinate to the modes of political, social and cultural regulation. In other words, the changes in the mode of accumulation are a reflection of the ideological changes in society and not simply a reflection or consequence of a global technological transformation. Harvey (2005:3) for example, argues that 'neoliberalism entails [requires] new ways of thinking and acting and requires new technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer and to analyse huge databases to guide decisions in the global market place, hence neoliberalism's interest in and pursuit of information technologies'.

So what happens to happen to higher education when ideological and economic changes collide?

## **Funding and competition in higher education in the 1980s and 1990s**

From 1979, universities were immediately subject to big cuts in spending and a reorganisation of their administration following the demise first of the UGC (the cherished buffer between the university and state) and then its successor the UFC in 1984 which were replaced by the Higher Education Funding Councils. The 1980s also saw the creation of the Research Assessment Exercise (1986) which many argue was an exercise in selectivity, (Brown and Carasso: 2013; 43-51) that is, it favoured certain institutions over others, often the older and more established ones. This is despite the methodology it employed its assessment, which ostensibly determined excellence in research by departments and disciplines (not institutions) and allocated the funding accordingly, however the accompanying ranking and funding differentials introduced a level of economic and status competition between individual institutions, unseen before in English higher education. This particular change as Scott (*The Guardian*: 2013) argues, changed the structure of universities and the behaviour of institutions (and individuals) for ever – for example the RAE (the RAE is discussed in depth in the next and final chapter) introduced this new level of competition and the perhaps, negative competitive institutional behaviours and the personnel casualties that sometimes come with that (Lucas: 2006). Watson and Bowden (2007: 6) state that the 1980s saw a contradictory approach to higher education by the Conservatives. First, dramatic cuts via the UGC budget were made to certain universities by Sir Keith Joseph in 1981 and this was followed up by the Green Paper of 1985, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*<sup>172</sup>. Watson and Bowden (*ibid*: 6) argue that this was about achieving economies and cutting the UGC grant by 15% over three years (as well as a failed attempt to introduce fees). It was also, they argue, about reducing student numbers and making higher education more economically relevant and this was to be achieved by a greater concentration and selectivity in research and a crack-down on certain subjects where students were seen as a drain on the economy. However, this strategy was reversed

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<sup>172</sup> *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s* (Green Paper) Cmnd 9524 London, HMSO, 1985.



overnight following Joseph's dismissal and the appointment of Kenneth Baker and kick started by the White Paper of 1987, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*. This period saw the implementation of the Education Reform act 1988, which for example, introduced the national curriculum for schools, removed polytechnics from local control and so laid the groundwork for the new universities of 1992 through the Higher Education Act 1992 which Watson and Bowden state was designed to 'de-stratify the system' by making the polytechnics and large colleges into independent corporations and then 'universities' by statutory authority rather than by charters. Watson and Bowden (2007: 6) also state that part of the rationale behind *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*<sup>173</sup> was to drive down the unit of resource, not least through competitive bidding initially setting the 'public sector' and the 'universities' against each other. Polytechnics were given university status in 1992 to remove them from local government control and government was thus able to gain control of them from the centre but what was the actual purpose of this, to create a competitive market in higher education or reduce expenditure or to open access to higher education to more of society, and what were the consequences to English higher education? An emeritus professor of higher education argued during the course of a research interview that local authorities were deemed to have been mismanaging the financial surplus received from polytechnics and that central government decided to bring this to an end. However, the vice-chancellor and professor of higher education at a suburban London post-92 (a) said that John Major had realised that polytechnics were a very cost effective way to run higher education. Indeed, this was echoed by the professor of English and Cultural studies at the Russell Group institution, who similarly stated that it was a way of equalizing the cost of the sector and funding the original universities along the lines of the polytechnics. However, and on an interesting point relating to the internal culture of polytechnics, this professor also pointed out that polytechnics in the late 1970s had moved much more into the traditional terrain of the universities, and this had developed their 'non-material interests' and so they had moved

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<sup>173</sup> White Paper (1987): *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*. (Command Paper) by Dept.of Education & Science

into ‘cultural activity’. For example, in the disciplines of social anthropology and in languages and that this development had given academics who were unable to find work in universities opportunities for employment and to further their careers. This argument was also made by the vice-chancellor of the suburban London post-92 (a), who argued that the polytechnics were much more like universities before 1992<sup>174</sup> than is widely thought today, thus there was a natural fit, so to speak, when the binary line was abandoned. It can be argued from this that the consequences of the unification of the HE system for the polytechnics was advantageous in a number of ways, joining two systems which were already much more alike than was publicly acknowledged and finally giving them, ostensibly at least, the same official status. It is also clear that by ‘equalizing’ the cost of the sector universities were subject to a leaner and more competitive financial environment. It can of course also be argued following from earlier discussions that the sector was unified as part of a drive to bring it closer to the economic imperatives of government, under closer control and that this marked another turning point in the freedom of higher education.

Indeed, the Thatcher period as Scott (1997; 36) argues, signalled a loss of autonomy for the [older] universities and in the process their elite conformity and (or) complicity was upset because they were drawn into public policy debates from which they had previously either been unconcerned with or had felt free to ignore: universities were becoming centre stage and were confronted with, as Scott (*ibid*) puts it, fractious [political] elites. Scott (2013: 39) also states that just as Crosland’s intervention in higher education through the establishment of the polytechnics marked perhaps the first occasion when politicians seriously dissented from the academic-led direction of higher education, the level of political dissatisfaction with universities sharply increased in the Thatcher period<sup>175</sup>. This period also saw the ending of secure tenure for academic staff enabling their dismissal and the introduction of fees for foreign students, a move begun under Robbins which was to have

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<sup>174</sup> These views are represented through the words of these participants in chapter six.

<sup>175</sup> See Wilby (2013) who argues that Margaret Thatcher set out to refashion the relationship between the state and universities because of political differences she encountered with them as Secretary of State for Education in the 1970s.

positive unintended consequences in terms of finance for universities. In summing up this period of political intervention in higher education, Watson and Bowden (2007: 7-8) state that during the 18 years of the Conservative stewardship the higher education system in England had seen significant lurches of policy, from contraction to expansion followed by consolidation. Moreover, major changes in governance and organisation, from institutional stratification to radical de-stratification, and from 'national' consolidation of funding methods –the so-called ending of the binary line – to territorial devolution. Overwhelmingly though, the period was characterised by and indeed crucially ended with the strains of underfunding. Thus this is the context in which Dearing began its Report.

### **The Dearing Report: National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education**

The political background to the Dearing Report offers an insight into how toxic higher education had become to government by 1997 and also offers parallels with today, as the level of inter-party agreement on its commissioning is almost identical to that of the Browne Report. The Conservative government launched the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) to be chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, a senior civil servant in 1996 with cross-party support making sure the publication of the Report would appear in 1997 after the General Election, thereby wiping the difficult issue of finance and student fees off the election agenda. The identical pattern followed with the handover of the Browne Report from Labour to the Conservatives in 2009-10<sup>176</sup>. Of course, the position of the two parties after the result of the Election in 2010 was in mirror image to 1997 (Callender and Scott: 2013; 1-2; Scott: 2013; 41). Trow (1998: 94) argues that the Report was designed precisely to remove the issue of finance from public discussion and indeed, Barr and Crawford (1998: 72) argue that the political problems around higher education are largely a result of economic concerns. The Dearing Report is argued as having been primarily about the financing of higher education into the future as the expansion of the system was outstripping the growth of GDP and in competition with other parts of the public sector for scarce

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<sup>176</sup> The Conservative Secretary of State of education who commissioned the Dearing Report in 1996 was Gillian Shepard. David Blunkett was the New Labour Secretary of State who received the Report in 1997 following the General Election.

resources (Shattock: 2013: 27). Moreover, the report is widely seen as the first moment when the intractable problem of the financing of higher education was overtly linked to the private interest of the individual. That is, the moment when the investment of the student in the stock of his or her own human capital for use in the labour market (Williams: 2013: 47) was made an explicit element of the rationale for higher education thus justifying a contribution by the private individual to his or her education. However, all this would presuppose that the NCIHE fudged the question of what the idea of higher education should be like for the sake of economic and thus political expediency. This was not the case though, and the Dearing Report set out a vision of higher education and the relationship of a diverse but integrated university system that would be inextricably related to the society it was situated in, in the course of supporting the development of a 'learning society'. Indeed, the title of the Report *Higher Education in the Learning Society* defined the aim of British universities as being '... to sustain a learning society (NCIHE: 1997; 13), in which students, institutions, the economy, employers and the state worked together but independently. Importantly, the report also focused on the importance of widening participation which become a central political discourse from 1997 under the New Labour administration. Indeed, Scott (2013) argues that the Dearing Report, although completed in less time than Robbins was of the same magnitude in terms of being a grand narrative inquiry into higher education and in its research, making it a valuable historical document. The question which follows from the grand vision of the Report is to what end is the university being put and what do terms like 'learning society', 'access' and 'widening participation' really mean in that context. The following sections of writing attempt to answer these questions about the purpose of higher education as the Dearing Report saw it then.

### **Higher Education in the Learning Society: new and old ideas of the university**

The Dearing Report itself begins by setting out its concern with the long term well-being of higher education and the hope that the needs of the short-term do not damage this, however in the Chairman's foreword and introductory notes it states that: 'Much of our report is concerned with material things and with the central role of higher education in the

economy. It would be surprising were it not so. But throughout we have kept in mind the values that characterise higher education and which are fundamental to any understanding of it. They were well expressed by John Masefield in an address at the University of Sheffield in 1946. Speaking of a university, he said, as we would now say of higher education as a whole speaking of a university, he said, as we would now say of higher education as a whole':

It is a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see; where seekers and learners alike, banded together in the search for knowledge, will honour thought in all its finer ways, will welcome thinkers in distress or in exile, will uphold ever the dignity of thought and learning and will exact standards in these things (Masefield, 1946 in NCIHE, 1997 introduction, 9-10).

To make sense of what is perhaps quite a cerebral and traditional liberal interpretation of the university and indeed of excellence (the exacting of standards) and how this is as an idea of higher education is intended to be applied by the NCIHE to modern competitive economic society, Barnett (2000) is instructive. Barnett (2000: 31) points to how some of the callings which were urged on higher education at this time and through the report were resonant of the traditional self-understandings of the university, but were at the same time however, juxtaposed for calls for a more performative university, attuned to the exacting requirements of skills, impact, standards, accountability and efficiency, and an institution that through access and participation would make the search for truth, an open public discourse making the university the 'conscience of society' (Barnett: 2000: 34; 50; 109; 151). And all this, as Barnett (2000: 31) states, just at a time when the university felt it was about to cast off its old clothes and become a more (post) modern [perhaps pragmatic] institution.

It is in this somewhat contradictory context that Williams (2013: 46) critiques the Dearing Report by pointing to the inconsistencies in its message. That is to say, Williams states that in the Report, Dearing sets out his vision for the 'learning society'. In doing this, Williams points to the way in which Dearing reassures universities of their free standing position in society, teaching to the highest level in an environment of scholarship and free inquiry (research). Indeed, this free standing vision, which perhaps rather strangely, given

the focus of the Report on higher education and its central role in the economy and ‘material things’, connotes an ivory tower of sorts, is encapsulated in the extract from John Masefield above. However, and as Williams (*ibid*) also points out, the Report also points to the way that universities are becoming increasingly more important to the economic well-being of the nation, localities and individuals (*ibid*: 46). In the same respect, Macfarlane (2009: 74) whilst discussing Barnett (2009) and the changing perceptions of the public role of the university which developed internationally during the twentieth century and which demand the university applies itself to the social and economic well-beings of communities and to the national economy as well as performing its traditional role as the purveyor of knowledge and culture, points to the massification of higher education as a way in part of explaining this expanding and multi-dimensional role of the university in society. In the specific context of the UK, Macfarlane (2009: 74) points to the Dearing Report and the way in which it explicitly aligns a purpose (or legitimating principle) of the university to the needs of the economy, nationally and more locally, particularly through the ‘third stream’ or the ‘third mission’ of the university after teaching and research. The third mission or third stream refers to the engagement of the university with the community and business and, the development of its own enterprise or entrepreneurial mission. The Dearing Report (NCIHE: 1997; 72) states that one of the purposes of higher education is ‘to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable knowledge-based economy at local regional and national levels’. So here, it possible to say that there is a contradiction with regard to the ideas of the university present in the quote from Masefield. The university is not the free standing institution (nor indeed the sanctuary implied in the quote) or community of scholars engaged in teaching and research and pursuing truth and knowledge to the highest degrees of excellence, but rather an institution that is geared to the development of competitive economic society. Moreover, it is arguable here that the university is not engaged with these external missions independently but as an institution inextricably linked to the economic imperative of the state. In other words, the philosophical statements regarding the purpose of higher education may appear in this context as little more than window dressing. Alternatively, it could be

argued that excellence is present here in its most purest, and widest application, that is, the onward and upward development of all, individually and as part of the community to a higher goal (although this is not stated). Or perhaps the idea is lost among the multi-dimensional roles that higher education is expected to play by the Dearing Report.

In attempting to disentangle the various missions of the university as the Report sees them from its over-arching vision, a representation of the key principles of the university set out in the Report will help.

- To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential level throughout their life, so that they can grow intellectually, are well-equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment;
- To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application for the benefit of the economy and society;
- to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable knowledge-based economy at local regional and national levels;
- to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilized inclusive society (NCIHE: 1997; 5.11).

So the Report does talk about the development of the individual and how higher education can ‘develop their capabilities to the highest potential level throughout their life’ (*ibid*), in the wider context of the collective or wider society and, crucially, it talks about personal fulfilment through that contribution. Now whether the development of and personal fulfilment of the individual is achieved because they have developed the skills to get a good career and contribute to society or because this process makes them feel that they are flourishing as a human being alive in the world (Barnett: 1998; 14) is open to question, the Report does not allude to any weighty philosophical questions such as this directly. However, it is possible to say that excellence defined as the centring or the equilibrium of

the individual is present in the legitimating principles of the Report, especially if the development of the individual is placed in the context of the final statement ‘to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilized inclusive society’ (*ibid*) which is resonant of Robbins, suggesting as it does, some greater equality and democratic engagement developing in society because of the increased participation in higher education and, its role in the community. Indeed, ‘To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application for the benefit of the economy and society’ (*ibid*) also suggests the maintenance of higher education as a valuable cultural asset in the aesthetic realm as an implicit if not explicit principle of the Report, although the application of these at the same time to the economy and wider society, is as always, problematic, in the sense that phrases like this pitch the university to the ‘benefit of the economy and society’ (save from the stated contribution to society’s civilized and inclusive development) and are of course open to interpretation, and can thus simply refer to the repositioning of the university in society as an institution capable of winning the global race by serving the needs of an adaptable, sustainable knowledge-based economy at local regional and national levels.

So we are back where we started with Williams (*ibid*) and the argument that Dearing was the first Report that explicitly aligned higher education with the needs of the economy. Indeed, Barnett (1998: 13) points to the way in which the Dearing Committee felt that progress in that direction should go as far and as fast as practicable citing student engagement with the world of work through the recommendations of the Report’s key themes and their intended application to the curriculum of the university, which were ‘breadth’ and ‘key skills’, which Barnett argues (*ibid*) had the makings of a fundamental transformation of the higher education curriculum [if only there was some substance behind the buzz words]. But the Report does at least imply the idea of higher education as the institution with the potential to develop something greater than we have now, at the individual and societal level even though it does not define exactly what the ‘learning society’ is. It is in this regard that Barnett (1998) critiques the Report and its emphasis on the need for skills in an uncertain and rapidly changing world (and what exactly these would be



given the unknown nature of the world to come) in which higher education is situated ‘in’ rather than being the institution that helps to create the learning society and being thus ‘for’ a new educative lifeworld in which human beings truly develop the dispositions to help make a new but uncertain world. It is in this regard that Barnett (1998:14) points to the way the concept of the learning society has been left undefined leaving at least four possible interpretations possible, including the emancipatory element of excellence set out above in this section. It would after all also be possible to have a society which valued life-long learning, or one that saw learning in principle as valuable for its own sake and (or) a lifelong enhancing process<sup>177</sup> or as was discussed earlier in this section, the learning society can be interpreted simply as a concept for utilizing knowledge and skills for national success in the global competitive economic society. Barnett (1999: 297-8) in comparing the Robbins and Dearing Reports argues that what is striking about the latter is ‘the overt concern with ‘globalisation’ and the need to reposition higher education such that it is enabling the economy both through its research and its pedagogical capacities to prosper amid a ‘globalised world’. Barnett’s (1999) argument in the paper *The Coming of the Global Village: A tale of two inquiries* is that the while Robbins Report reflected the internal voices of the ‘rural village’ of academia, the Dearing Report reflected the voices of the external emerging global village. Thus the Dearing Report reflected the exigencies of the polity and centred on the discourses important to wider society and the economy, not the university. Barnett (1998/9) also focuses on the paucity of coverage in the Dearing Report on matters such as teaching, that is being a teacher, pedagogy and the curriculum etc., instead focusing on the concept of the student as learner without adding any substance to this whilst proclaiming higher education as ‘the conscience of society’. Barnett states that:

There are three major omissions, made all the more poignant because of the appearance of ‘the learning society’ in the title of the Report. They are the lack of any serious discussion of, firstly, students and what it is to be a student; secondly, critical thought in a learning society (its value and character); and thirdly, the challenges of being a professional in modern society. If, for example, the Report had started with an analysis of what it is to be a

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<sup>177</sup> In fact as Barnett (1998: 15) points out, the Report does engage with this concept of the learning society only to link it to competitive economic society. (NCIHE: 1.10.)

professional – in the broadest sense of ‘professional’ – in the modern world and worked out an educational strategy from that, we might have received a much more educationally exciting, not to say coherent report. From such an analysis, we might have received a sense of what it is to be a critical, self-reflexive practitioner and that in turn could have prompted a consideration of the kinds of human development we should be trying to sponsor in higher education so as to produce such examples of ‘critical being’ (Barnett: 1999;17).

The professionalization of higher education, in particular teaching in universities as it was envisaged by the Report is discussed below shortly, firstly however, this section continues with a transatlantic view of Dearing. Trow (1998) also addresses the deficiencies of the Report in a withering critique of its Chairman and his singular failure to understand higher education because of his non-academic background (Sir Ron Dearing was a senior civil servant and former head of the post office) and much of the Committee on the same grounds, as well their failings in properly accounting for the financial projections it makes for a higher education system which they had not understood was still one in transition from elite to mass in nature. Fundamentally, and in a similar way to Barnett (1998), Trow (1998: 94) critiques the Report on the grounds that the Report is written from outside the system looking in (Barnett: 1998: 96). Trow’s frustration with the Report and its lack of understanding of what life on the ground was like in the increasingly bureaucratic and externally administered world of the universities at that time can be read in this extract.

And despite the mass of evidence gathered, at point after point the Report reveals a shocking ignorance about how universities actually work, and how their administrators and teaching staff have responded to the pressures of the past two decades. There is no serious description or analysis of the transformation of the teaching/learning environment as the student/staff ratio has doubled, and as the administrative staff has expanded and expanded again under the burden of accountability documents and reports. And how much of the creative imagination of the senior administrative staff has gone into trying to outwit HEFC with one barely legal scam after another (Trow: 1998: 96).

In his paper, Trow (1998: 94-5) creates a hypothetical scenario in which the Chairman is asked his views of what the size and shape of higher education should look like in the future, Trow offers a likely reply from Dearing that reads like apology for a committee of inquiry tasked with making the unenviable task of introducing student fees and making other efficiencies because of the cuts that had been made in the past to higher education and

because of the cuts to come in the future<sup>178</sup> through the diminishing unit of resource in an expanding system. This is an extract from Dearing's hypothetical reply as imagined by Trow:

On the second big issue of how to maintain academic standards in the face of these cuts in support, we have made many recommendations, arguing that old patterns of teacher/student relationship that may have been possible under student/staff ratios of 8:1 are no longer possible. The changed circumstances of British higher education require changed patterns of teaching, new patterns which involve much more efficient use of their time by both teachers and students. Better institutional management of the time of staff, and the use of the new modes of instructional technology may mitigate the negative effects of the sharp decline of resources going into teaching – negative effects which we mention briefly though we see no point in dwelling on them (Trow: 1998: 94-95).

This satirical extract from Trow in fact alludes to some of the key recommendations of the Report, including the professionalization of teaching in the academy referred to in the quote from Barnett (1998) above. The Report recommended that the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE)<sup>179</sup> be established along with the formalisation of teaching and accompanying employment contracts. The Committee suggested that three planks should be put in place if teaching were to be effective: technology, training, research and development (Barnett: 1998; 10). The Report placed great emphasis on the importance of Information Technology (IT) in the future of higher education and recommended a co-ordinated national strategy. It also recommended that the hitherto informal training of lecturers be made systematic and universal. Barnett (1998: 10) quotes from the Report thus: 'placing higher education teaching on a professional basis requires a strong foundation of theoretical and practical research into learning and teaching processes (NICHE: 8.64). However, and as Barnett argues, nowhere is the pedagogic process addressed in-depth in the Report from a purely educative perspective that might explain the process of individual development, save for the student being placed centre stage as 'learner' rather than as an active participant in a heuristic environment.

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<sup>178</sup> See Watson and Bowden (2007: 9) who state that a key message of the Report was a warning against cutting short-term funding.

<sup>179</sup> The ILTHE has now been absorbed into a similar body, the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

The Report also recommended a greater role for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for quality audit and assessment and, following Dearing in 2000, external examination in the form of Subject and Institutional review was implemented. Watson and Bowden (2007: 6-51) argue that the core ideas of the Report have made a difference to higher education. These include: the priority of widening participation; the enhancement of learning and teaching and related staff development; the value of work experience; the irreducible responsibility of institutions for making awards, including through franchised arrangements, linked with the central role of the QAA; the creation of the Office for Independent Adjudication for making complaints; the creation of the Arts and Humanities Research Council; actions to improve university governance; better information for intending students; and finally the previously criticised move to ensure the breadth and depth of university programmes. Watson and Bowden in pointing to an earlier work by Watson and Taylor (1998)<sup>180</sup>, also argue that there are at least four sets of animating ideas in the Report. First, the idea of lifelong learning as embedded in the qualifications framework, the ability of students to transfer between institutions in the system, second, its overall vision for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as embodied in ideas about credit and qualifications, the aforementioned assurance of standards and quality, teacher professionalism, thirdly, the funding of research according to its intended outcomes (impact) as set out in a multi-stranded model for research evaluation and funding which led to the rejection of the notion of a ‘teaching only university’. Finally, the big idea was the ‘compact’. This refers to an idea set out by David Blunkett when he responded to the Report in parliament after the 1997 General Election. Here, institutions retain their independence and gain increased scrutiny in return for clearer accountability (especially on standards) and greater responsiveness to a wide range of legitimate stakeholders.

There are then, different perceptions of the Dearing Report, what it represented and more importantly perhaps, what the consequences were to be for English higher education

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<sup>180</sup> Watson, D and Taylor, R. (1998) *Lifelong Learning and the University: A post-Dearing agenda*. London: Falmer Press.

following its recommendations. Writing ten years after the Report but before Browne (2010), Watson and Bowden see the recommendations of the NICHE as largely positive in outcome. However, looking back now, past both Browne at Dearing, it is possible to see the how the seeds of greater student consumerism were planted in the notion of the ‘learner’ as the central figure in the pedagogic dynamic, and in the requirement of information for intending students, there is also a foreshadowing of the Key Information Sets implemented by the White Paper of 2011. Moreover, the explicit aligning of higher education and a university education with competitive economic society in a framework of greater accountability can be argued to have drawn the university further from its position as an independent institution in search of truth and knowledge for some greater good, and firmly into the ‘knowledge society’ and the ‘global race’ and servant of the surveillance state. Scott (2013: 39) in discussing the macro narrative<sup>181</sup> or ‘modernization’ of English higher education, argues that this process is part of an even larger narrative. This is the erosion of the post-war welfare state and the corresponding rise of the market state with more pronounced market oriented practices. This is associated with new forms of society, for example, the ‘risk’, ‘information’ and ‘audit’ societies and new forms of individualized identities moulded by consumer culture and expressed by through so-called ‘social-media’ (*emphasis by Scott*).

## Conclusion

When looked at in this context of ideological change, the positioning of the Masfield quote at the outset of the Dearing Report now seems more incongruous than ever in its evocation of a sanctuary of learning in which excellence is practised for its own sake. However, it is also the case that the Report articulated the elements of excellence and a call for a more democratic participation in higher education and a representation of that participation in citizenship in shaping wider society. It also set out the role of higher

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<sup>181</sup> Scott (2013: 39) also discusses the ‘micro’ or ‘evolutionary’ narrative of English higher education which looks at the particular development of the system, that is the political back story of English higher education which this chapter has attempted to place side-by-side with the macro narrative for evaluation.

education for individual development and flourishing even if that development was framed in the context of economic society. Indeed, it might be argued that excellence and the global race exist together, excellence vying or working alongside with economic society for recognition.

Therefore, it is argued here that the Dearing Report did articulate the discourse of emancipatory excellence, although this is subsumed beneath the discourse of the global race. Finally, the idea of widening participation can never be said to be a bad thing. As many have stated, including a number of participants for this research project, the idea that more higher education in society is a bad thing is plainly a ludicrous suggestion; how can the individual development of more be bad? (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-92a and Policy institute expert) However, what higher education is like, what it is ultimately for and how we experience it, particularly as students matters (Barnett: 2013). Indeed, perhaps, as Barnett (2007: 154) suggests, the most important aspect of the Report was the unimplemented recommendation from Dearing (NICHE: 1997a; 1.27) that there be established a framework for sustaining an informed and critical dialogue in the context of the ‘compact’, the context of interconnection and mutual dependence between higher education and society. The framework would allow voices from all sides to interpret their idea of higher education with reference to the needs of society and indeed, the university. In an invocation of the ideal speech situation Barnett states that:

... it is surely a *sine qua non* of a system such as higher education coming to a proper and collective understanding of itself that there be such a space for informed and continued discussion. In the process higher education might just understand itself a new and, in turn, find a new way of being and becoming itself (Barnett: 2007; 154)

So the remainder of this thesis attempts to theorize what higher education could be like in the future and discusses the space in which that might be agreed, through literature review and research interview material.

The final section of this chapter however, concludes with the critique of the Browne Report, first presented in the introduction to this thesis, and the response of the Coalition

government to it. This thesis began its journey here and so it has come full-circle, so to speak, and arrived back in the contemporary context where political changes or more accurately, potential political changes associated with the forthcoming general election threaten English higher education with more uncertainty over its funding and, its future direction.

### **The Browne Report and the response of the Coalition**

However, before moving on to Browne and the Coalition – there is perhaps a differentiation to be made between the Report and the Government’s response after all, it is useful in terms of continuity to look briefly at the way that the New Labour administration made use of the Dearing Recommendations.

Scott (2013: 41-2) identifies four phases of policy following Dearing. The first phase was the decision to implement fees in a modified form but more important was the engagement with the discourse of widening participation (incorporated into the funding methodology of HEFCE) and the life-long learning agenda and the establishment of the HEA by Labour’s first Secretary of State, David Blunkett. The latter was intended to give a stronger focus on teaching and research in higher education. The second phase began with Blunkett’s successor, Charles Clark’s initiation of a White Paper and the subsequent decision to substantially increase fees through the Higher Education Act 2004. The decision was, as Scott (2013: 41) states, the most hotly contested of the Blair Government and was pushed through parliament by a promise to review the effects of higher fees in three years – the genesis of the Browne Review (Scott: 2013;42). Of equal importance perhaps, was the decision taken to replace the RAE with the REF and to measure ‘impact’ as well as assess quality. The third phase was the establishment of the Department for Universities Innovation and Skills (DIUS) under the next Secretary of State, John Denham removing the responsibility of the DoE for higher education and thus signalling the subordination of higher education to the economy (Scott: 2013; 42). Scott (*ibid*) also argues that Denham’s tenure as secretary of state was also characterised by a contradiction formed in a debate initiated by him on the future of the English higher education which placed an emphasis on

the mission of the research intensive universities within the mass system that had already developed, whilst side-stepping the urgent need to debate fees which were already in need of significant increase to fund the expanded system and presumably, the commitment to widening participation. The fourth phase began under Peter Mandleson, John Denham's successor who was made responsible for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the new home of higher education, moving it, as Scott (*ibid*) argues, even further away from its home at the DoE and reinforcing its links with improving economic performance. The new First Secretary set up the Independent Committee on Student Fees and Funding under Lord Browne. This all seems to reaffirm the bi-partisan nature of policy on higher education in terms of the continuity of thinking about the positioning of the university in the economy and the agreement that not only would fees increase to fund the system but that it was right for students to contribute to a degree that has exchange value in economic society. But what did the Browne Report (hereinafter the Browne Report) actually say and what did the Coalition government make of it? How did their implementation of it differ from the Browne Report's recommendations, particularly after the latter's mediation through the government White Paper of 2011 and what have been the consequences of these policies? Moreover, and crucially, how was it different to the two previous reports on higher education and what does this mean for the future public understanding of higher education?: a question taken up again in earnest in the following and final chapter. The remaining sections of this chapter will argue that the Browne Report and the Coalition response represent a failed attempt to introduce a market into the university system which had the potential to invert the very notion of higher education. That is, the potential to change it from an institution where individuals go to learn and develop new attributes and dispositions in an environment of exploration and mystery and therefore, take part in the pedagogic process as students in search of knowledge through teaching and independent thought and inquiry (Barnett: 1990; 2013), to a place, which through a reading of the Browne Report and the 2011 White Paper *Students at the Heart of the System*<sup>182</sup>, connotes a consumer-driven

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<sup>182</sup> See Browne Report (2010: 3.3) for origins of the notion that students are at the heart of the system.



degree mill (Browne Report: 4; 4.1&3) churning out students with the requisite skills for a knowledge economy precariously positioned in the so-called global race or as the Report puts it ‘the increasingly competitive global knowledge economy’ (Browne Report: 2010: 1;1.1). Indeed, Collini (2012: 178-9) argues that the most notable change to higher education was not the proposed complete removal of the fee cap and the consequences of this for individuals in terms of financial burden and (or) even participation in the first instance, but rather, the way the Report explicitly stated that students as consumers should drive a competitive market in higher education and intensify competition between institutions as the arbiters not only of quality but in terms of what is offered by universities and how this relates to their individual interest. It is arguable that if this were the only way university education was to be perceived higher education might cease to be understood as a public good. However, this thesis argues that excellence is still a legitimating principle of English higher education, at least as it is perceived inside the university, and that although the Coalition’s reforms and interventions are intended to prioritise the economic contribution that higher education can make through skills, research development and technological innovation, and this eclipses or hides excellence from view, the emancipatory ideal is still alive and well in the academy. To that end, this critique of the Browne Report and the Coalition reforms includes research material from some of the interviews conducted for this thesis. The material includes extracts from an interview conducted with a member of the Browne Review panel, who is a serving vice-chancellor. It also includes extracts from participants whose contributions were made as lecturers and from current and (or) past senior administrators in the university as well as an interest group leader/policy specialist and a professor of higher education. These responses are critiqued themselves in some instances, in others they are used to interrogate and critique the central themes of the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011). A number of the responses discuss the

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The Report says: ‘The relationship between the student and the institution will be at the heart of the system; and institutions will have more autonomy than today to respond to what students want’ when discussing how student choice will drive up quality and transparency and create greater competition in the system (Browne Report: 2010; 4.1).

Russell Group and the other mission groups representing English higher education and the concluding sections of the chapter also serve as an implicit critique of the mission groups and the competition they engender, particularly that by the Russell Group. Before beginning the critique of the Browne Report its key principles and themes are presented.

**The Report: Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance**

So the Browne Report set out the following six principles:

- more investment was needed in higher education
- there should be greater student choice
- everyone with the potential should be able to benefit
- no student should be expected to make any financial contribution to the cost of HE before they are in work
- any payments that they make should be affordable
- part-time students should be treated in the same way as full-time students

The six principles as Scott (2013) explains corresponded to six areas of weakness identified by the Browne Report: first, there were not enough places to meet student demand; second, the existing system because of its dependence on direct public funding was vulnerable to reductions in that spending (the fundamental purpose of Browne was to produce a Report on a sustainable future for HE); third, there had only been limited progress with regard to access, widening participation; fourth, the system was inadequate for part-time students; fifth, the system was not responsive enough to the demands of the economy; and finally and of most salience with regard to the arguments made in this chapter, there had been limited improvements in the student experience which as Scott (2013: 45) points out, enabled Browne to focus on student choice and therefore competition, despite the absence of any consensus and based on any real discussion of what the student experience actually is. Sections of this chapter concentrate on this experience in the context of teaching and the consequences of the market and competition on higher education and access to it. This

chapter does not therefore cover the issues of part-time or postgraduate access, which were touched upon in the introduction to the thesis.

### **After Browne: the market and competition**

During the course of a research interview in 2012, a vice-chancellor who sat on the Browne panel was asked for their insight into the thinking and indeed, the fundamental philosophy behind the Browne Report recommendations and the Coalition's White Paper response (BIS: 2011) and if they agreed with Lord Browne's idea that the market was the appropriate mechanism to drive up standards and quality, particularly in teaching in universities. The responses of this participant provide a different and perhaps surprising perspective on the idea of the student as the learner 'at the heart of the system' (*ibid*). That response is represented shortly, firstly however this participant's view of the response of the Coalition to the Browne Report provides a useful and indeed, insightful overview of the political rationale for the Coalition reforms from inside the university. When asked how the Coalition reforms and policy corresponded to the original intentions of the Browne Report, the participant replied that the response of the government represented a 'pick and mix' approach and that the Coalition had chosen some of the Report's recommendations and ignored others. With regard to the central and most contentious recommendation, student fees, the Coalition had of course accepted the need for an increase but placed a cap at £9000. The participant considered that the Coalition's response was guided first by the presence of the Liberal-Democrats in the government and the furore surrounding the broken election promise and this had led in part to the fee cap, but that the response was also indicative of a market approach to higher education. The measures that came after, for example, the AAB/ABB and core and margin strategies were mechanisms to calibrate a system in which student numbers were too high, (a system where most institutions had, against expectations, decided to charge the maximum fee), for government finances and represented a pragmatic approach pegged and pinned onto a political philosophy. The participant said that:

I think there's a genuine belief amongst some of our politicians that a proper market would be a very good thing, and they think that some of these things will help to develop a proper market, but there's also [pause] the reason why

it's such a pick and mix is that's also been constrained, even that - going towards a proper market, that's been constrained, that is, how do we make it a market has been constrained by the short-term need to constrain numbers, in particular to control number without a higher education Bill. We have no Bill because of the division between the two parties in the Coalition and the concern is, that if we had a Bill, the issue of the fee cap would come up again as a division between the two parties, without a Bill they have no straightforward way of controlling the student numbers ... particularly at the higher cost institutions but also at the other institutions... .... and so of course there is a real anxiety at the Treasury about the cost of student loans and about how we're going to pay for this... ... it's a random kind of pick and mix, that's the problem, so it's a mixture of a strong driving philosophy from some politicians that a market will drive standards up, and I think that John Browne felt that very strongly and [still] feels that very strongly as well, but it's a mixture of that with all these kind of pragmatic short-term measures, to try and constrain all these problems, it's not a whole set of things designed to go together, it's a kind of philosophy with lots of pragmatic clips, pegs and pins attached to it (Vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review).

When the participant was asked about the question of philosophy - if they agreed with Lord Browne that a market would drive up standards, the participant said that:

I do think there are some parts of competition that will drive up standards and I do think that the old system whereby there was no movement, essentially almost no movement between universities, and you had your HEFCE allocation [the T grant] and you had it whether you were delivering a high quality education product or whatever. Now, I don't think that many universities were delivering a 'whatever' category but actually it could have been used to drive up standards in the teaching part of courses much more effectively than it was, and I do think that if most students would like to go to you know, to three universities, and if those three universities choose to expand to do that, I think there is a certain [pause] and ... why shouldn't students if they've got the entry qualifications to get in and why shouldn't the universities be allowed to expand to meet that need. So I do think that there's an element of giving students some choice that has a lot of positives in it and I do think that sharpening up the competition in teaching is something that we needed. We've had such focus on research excellence and on competition which has driven up research quality, it may have gone too far as some people are suggesting now, but I do think that we need some equivalent to drive up quality in the teaching and learning element of what we do (Vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review).

At this point in the interview it was suggested to the participant – who was clearly echoing the sentiments of the White Paper (BIS 2011: 2) - that they might be of the opinion that teaching in higher education needed to be significantly improved. They replied that they were. When asked if they thought teaching was bad or of poor quality in the university or just missing/absent in terms of lack of contact hours or because of a lack of competent people this was the answer:

No, I think there's a lot of competent teachers, no I think there are lots of hugely committed academics who love engaging with students, there is a small proportion for who a range of reasons, you know, teaching is not one of their priorities because for some of them they have loads and loads of research which is bringing them in lots of benefits and that's fine for some of them, but for some teaching should be much more a priority, particularly as increasingly, the students are bringing in a significant proportion of their salary. But previous actions [government interventions] have put that distortion into the system and this has made research much more important than teaching, both in research-intensive and research-led universities like this one but where research is the more important part of what the university does it has become like the Holy Grail. I think we need to get back to the old concept of the university, where actually, teaching was as/or more valued initially than research but certainly as valued as research, it was a community of scholars and that community of scholars included the students<sup>183</sup>, that wasn't just the academic staff and the post-doc's and PhD's, that was all of the learning community in the institution, I think we need to get back to that (Vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review).

Asked if they thought we could in fact get back to the old concept of the university the participant replied that yes, we could but it would not be the same as an old medieval Cambridge college, but that:

We need to get back to a bit more of that feeling that the students are part of this learning community and actually, back to the feeling that every one of them brings something in that enriches the community, they all enhance our community, it's not just a case of they come in and we transmit to them, they enhance our community and we all learn something from every student we engage with (Vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review).

At the end of this part of the interview, and following from the exchange represented above, this participant concurred that universities were not in fact like degree mills, however their answers also suggested something as equally important; the existence of a lifeworld in

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<sup>183</sup> Asked about their memories of being an undergraduate (at Durham in the 80s) a participant said: 'I was taught in pretty small classes, in my final year there were six in one class and three in another, by people who were not publishing machines by any stretch of the imagination they had their own interests but there was a strong emphasis upon [pause] not teaching in a formal way but making students feel like members of an intellectual community, I remember that very strongly, now that's partly because of my own enthusiasm but there was a very strong sense of that' (professor of sociology, Russell Group university).

Asked about life as professor and teaching and responding in the context of a discussion about the compartmentalization of student learning which was so different to their own experience, they said: 'I think we'd all welcome a proper discussion and debate about what it is we do but not in the context of departmental committees and not with an agenda ... .. and we've not made the space or time for a discussion on what sociology is about and what the students ought to learn... ..' (Professor of sociology, Russell Group university).

higher education, and indeed, a desire for a more integrated and communicative one. It also of course underscores the point that vice-chancellors are very much still active participants in the academy but also operate in the political sphere and, are political. However, this extract provides not only an interesting insight in to the thinking of a member of the Browne Review, as well as an administrator and academic, but also represents somewhat of a paradox when viewed in light of the Coalition reforms. That insight suggests that the inversion of the pedagogic process written into the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011), an inversion in which the student as ‘learner’ is constructed as anything but an equal member of the community, is unrepresentative of the philosophy of those in higher education, at least the philosophy of this particular vice-chancellor. However, there is another paradox contained in the view of this participant. That the ‘old’ concept of the university and excellence in teaching can be achieved through the mechanism of competition and the market, when competition in research combined with the Coalition reforms is already argued (A professor of higher education at a post-1992 university: see introduction) to have the potential to create a hierarchical system in which the university has the potential to ‘become the institution that, as its crowning glory holds excellence, defined simplistically as high quality, aloft as the pinnacle of elitism: the concentration of resource at the top of a pyramidal higher education sector’ (*ibid*). Indeed, this is exactly what the participant currently under discussion was proposing when they suggested that certain universities should be able to expand to take those students who meet the entry criteria and whom exercise their choice when selecting the best institutions. Indeed, they went further by saying that they would strongly support government’s recognition of a small elite in higher education to maintain standards and the international reputation of English higher education, an idea which, as another participant (Chief Executive Officer for small interest group and policy expert) pointed out is in complete contradiction to the notion that ‘the market decides’. However, the argument that research be concentrated in few institutions to allow teaching to flourish in the rest is one that can also be heard in the words of a professor of a new university, a respondent in Amoah’s (2007: 116) ‘100 Voices’: *the state of the HE*

*nation* survey. The professor (Amoah: 2007; 116) expressed this view in the context of a response which echoed the vice-chancellor's above, in that they were concerned that an intensive research mission like their own detracted from teaching. However, a professor of social policy in the same study expressed the opposing view, that resources should be devoted to the core-mission of teaching. This latter view is addressed and countered now through the responses of other participants in this research project.

In returning now to teaching directly then, and the expression of excellence made by the participant and member of the Browne Review, the concept of the 'old' university that is, the scholastic community and its lifeworld (this is almost symmetrical to the concept expressed in the Masefield extract leading the Dearing Report), can be juxtaposed with the paradoxical notion expressed in the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011) that students can discern what is and is not a good education through the transparency of information provided by the university. Of crucial importance in this discussion of teaching, is the absence of any debate on what the pedagogic process in higher education actually is (Barnett: 2013) and how teaching actually changes for the better simply because of competition, save for the implication that the best teachers will be attracted to the leading institutions which are ranked through the National Student Survey and key information sets (BIS: 2011; 2; 2.1; 3.11). However, a reader in sociology at a post-92 ostensibly expressed similar views on teaching to that of the vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review quoted above. Her views though can be read as a critique of the vice-chancellor's views above, as this participant in asserting the positive role of consumerism in higher education seems also to present and so espouse the liberal emancipatory philosophy of higher education (Barnett: 1990) The reader said that unlike the US, consumerism was not yet culturally embedded in England but that she encouraged the students to start to use their new power (presumably: 'student financial power' as proposed in the White Paper 2011: BIS; executive summary,6.) and when asked if she believed in consumerism, said:

I just say to them [the students] 'you should be knocking down our doors and demanding more, you shouldn't just be at lectures and seminars and anything else that's on offer but you should be knocking... you are the consumer, you

should be getting the best value you can out of being here', [participant's emphasis] but I haven't had any one knocking down my door - yet. I am always struck, I think it's crazy [pause] it's a two way thing, you know, we are obliged to develop and deliver you know, high quality materials for teaching, whatever that is, power-point slides or whatever and a deep knowledge base that goes with it and present work in ways that's interesting for students. The other side of that is that I just think students are crazy if they're not actually going along to sit in a lecture, join in a lecture even, and certainly going to seminars, so I'd want to see students more active, I'd love to see them demanding more<sup>184</sup> (Reader in sociology, post-92)

Asked why they did not demand more the reader replied:

Well, I think it's partly cultural, it's culture, a lot of students come at eighteen from school where they've been spoon-fed material basically<sup>185</sup> – and the idea that actually [pause] you know, I think it's quite [pause] I think it's a significant shift that they have to make in terms of [saying] 'I'm responsible for my learning and I can make decisions here, I can be a consumer of education and I can do this and do that and go and have this conversation or whatever'. And I think there's still a teacher–pupil relationship at the beginning and it obviously takes a while at the start for people to start gaining confidence and obviously people learn in different ways as well so that's something for them to have to get grips with (Reader in sociology, post-92)

So 'consumerism' here can be read not simply as an economic exchange between university and student but rather, the student as a 'consumer' of education can be viewed as an active and independent participant in a pedagogic process in which dialogue is key, and the free 'consuming' of knowledge is part and parcel of being in the university and there for the taking, if the motivation is there. It can be argued from this that student engagement or lack of engagement has very little to do with the quality of teaching and of teachers and quite the opposite in fact (as the Browne Review member's responses revealed), but how students are prepared for university. The reader went on to discuss the purpose and possibilities of higher education and in particular in sociology as she saw it. She was asked if she thought young people still arrived at university with an idealistic vision, despite the fee rise, but first she was asked about her own role as a researcher and teacher in a post-92 and how this was

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<sup>184</sup> A professor of Geography and the head of a big school at a 1994 Group Robbins university said that during his time as an undergraduate at Oxford it was the extra-curricular activities that developed him most, indeed the lecturer who had most influence on him did not in fact teach him – he talked to him independently.

<sup>185</sup> The dean of an arts and humanities faculty at a suburban London post-92 said: 'A lot of the kids who come are doing it because it's a continuation of school. They expect it to be a continuation from school. One of the statistics you look at that's absolutely terrifying would be the percentage of students who fail the course first time. It's something like 50% in the first year'.



viewed outside the academy. The reader said that because she was in a research-active institution herself she would be 'very sad' if she thought the Coalition reforms were to lead to teaching only universities and a separation between these and research institutions.

People come to me because of the body of research I am known for, not because of the university I am at. I was up at the House of Commons last week talking to a Labour and a Liberal-Democrat Member of Parliament who know me because of my research. What's really important [to me] is certainly being in a research active university. I think the way I see universities potentially going, is that you will have the elite ones that do very well in the REF, that are the predominantly research-based, the Russell Group basically, and then amongst the rest it's sort of jostling ... and then some people will just accept that they're going to be in teaching universities. I'd be very, very sad if I thought that this university would just be a teaching university because I think the best teaching is informed by research active staff ... I use my research in the teaching that I do just to show the students examples of what they could or might do and what is happening in sociology now... (Reader in sociology, post-92)

Asked about the possibilities of higher education and if they thought that young people still come to university with an idealistic vision of what it could do for them and think to themselves 'what could I be or do', she replied thus, presenting a liberal notion of the development of individual dispositions and attributes and thus the emancipation of the self:

Perhaps for a lot of students who first come here and I think that people of course change once they get here and I think we were saying earlier that there's a real shift between school and that idea of what universities are for and then realising what that institution might be able to do and then there are some people who come and are completely untouched by their experience here ... the teaching and learning are almost incidental to their life here ... whereas others come and become completely shaped and changed by it and see possibilities and all of those things, it's an interaction that takes place ... In classes, quite often we'll have local mature students and then students from independent schools and people for the first time perhaps will see that life is different for some people ... (Reader in sociology, post-92)

Asked if the leitmotif of the humanities, 'difference' was still relevant in the education of students and if she had a socio-political mission herself, she replied that she did and gave an answer indicative of excellence defined as the emancipatory mission of higher education.

I am political and that's why I'm a sociologist, something I just absolutely can't bear is injustice, and I just think that we live in a divided world, I think through sociology you can basically equip students with the tools to interrogate and hopefully understand how differences and divisions and all of those things are experienced and how they become reproduced and reinforced and hopefully how you can change all of those things, that is, beyond what is [amongst some individuals] simply a myopic view ... but just to be able to get people to

start to question things outside their lives is absolutely what I would be getting people to do (Reader in sociology, post-92)

The reader was asked about the perception held of her university by the students and those outside the institution. The reader refuted the notion that an elitist agenda had been successful in differentiating the HE sector. That is, Coalition policy argued to be geared at differentiating the sector along vocational, academic lines and encouraging the older universities to be academic, research based institutions, and the post-92's vocational, had been unsuccessful.

That's failed, I mean the only thing that sort of differentiates universities really is the Russell Group. We're aware of there being this elite group of universities etc., etc., and when the REF scores come out and things like that come out that will be another indicator of 'something' [participant's emphasis]. But this university has always occupied an unusual position because it benefits hugely from its geographical location [in the same city as another and much older university] so that sells it. We've recruited well even with fees going up... ... I mean we've had our fees capped because that's how we've been able to continue with the development here, after a local agreement with the council and community ... ... The campus will be fabulous. There's going to be great big new library and resources centre ... ... it's going to bring the whole campus crashing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So this university is unusual, I mean it's not like a whole lot of other universities, I mean we are very aware of where we are on league tables and things, it's always had a very good reputation as the best of the new universities, it's determined not to go down the just teaching university route and to have research and hopefully do well in the REF and so on. This university is very aware of itself in the market (Reader in sociology, post-92).  
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So in these extracts this participant questions the true significance of the Russell Group and indeed, its status and reputation as an elite group and emphasises the importance of research to her and her institution as well as to all universities. This is contextualised in a socio-political mission that views the discipline of sociology as emancipatory for the individual (student) in their personal development and their knowledge of the world which is then geared to how we might change its inequalities. However, this affirmation of higher education as the emancipatory institution in a post-Browne world is placed in the context of an acknowledgment, an affirmation of competition and the market in higher education and indeed, a desire to be in an elite group – to be the best or at the pinnacle of excellence as

defined by the competitive ranking system. Indeed, the question that is bound to be asked again is, why are competition and the market the necessary or appropriate drivers for good teaching and research as this participant was (so obviously) motivated by a socio-political commitment. Engagement with the students was obviously of great reward to them and the lack of consumer instinct amongst the student population did not detract from her desire to provide and indeed, deliver excellent teaching. What perhaps stands out the most in her words about teaching is the understanding that when students first arrive at university they are unformed in terms of how to learn and take advantage of higher education and perhaps, unable at first to truly comprehend it. In this conceptualisation of higher education at least, excellence is a process of individual development which takes place through the exploration of the possibilities and potential of the university, which belies the notion in the White Paper (BIS: 2011) that students and, indeed universities, can say definitively before the pedagogic process is underway, through for example, key information sets, how exactly the experience will shape and benefit the student in the world of work (BIS: 2011; 2.8; 2.11; 3.2). A university education is not simply reducible therefore to its economic utility in the labour market or a set of transferable skills which produce an economic return to the student in this. Viewed in this context, the positioning of universities in league tables, designed essentially to sell the best teaching product to the student as a consumer, becomes somewhat meaningless, and an exercise which arguably detracts from the real story of higher education: the striving for excellence in the lifeworld of the university where outcomes are unpredictable and success relies on the effort and the character of the individual. Students are indeed at ‘the heart of the system’ then, and a system of engagement and a philosophy of higher education which was already in existence before the arrival of the Coalition reforms (*emphasis added*). Moreover, and again in echoing Barnett (2013), it seems that students truly become ‘learners’ only after a process of exploration and a questioning of themselves in relation to others and the world around them and only then therefore are they at ‘the heart of the system’ as a consequence of this sometimes difficult process (*emphasis added*). Not because of a prior mutual agreement between student and institution which is set out in a

charter or because they are engaged as co-participants in a quality assurance review of institutions, both of which mechanisms the White Paper (BIS: 2011; 3. 4, 16) recommended and both of which, perhaps, arguably, work against the autonomy of the university which the White Paper (BIS: 2011) from the outset assures us is at the heart of its reforms. The head of a school of the built environment at a post-92 and a member of the QAA before the Coalition reforms said this about the value of quality assurance and its relationship to excellence when interviewed after the publication of the White Paper in 2011.

If you're going back to the [discussion] of the quality of education and the pursuit of excellence, as somebody who led the bid for our centre of excellence in teaching and learning - and interestingly it's called the centre of excellence 'for' teaching and learning, it was about our pursuit of excellence, it wasn't actually about being excellent and the whole of the QAA stuff is not about excellence, it's about consistency and what it says on the tin... ... [*participant's emphasis*] Having been a subject reviewer and institutional auditor, it's about [pause] if you've got stuff in the public domain, if it says that on your website ... .. how do you know that that's accurate 'Mr University', not is it good enough material, but how do you know it's accurate, how do you know it's not misleading, 'students how did you find out - is it doing what it says on the tin'? [*the participant's emphasis*] That's not about excellence, and you're not assessing excellence through the quality process at all, you're looking for features of good practice but good practice about how you do stuff not how necessarily about how you're producing the best bunnies in the world. Because it's not really judging your output in terms of research - don't get me on to the RAE and the REF in terms of whether that's judging satisfactorily research output, of course it's not, it's a game (Head of School of the Built Environment at suburban London post-92).

Given the context of the reply represented above, the head was then asked the following questions: How useful is it to keep on talking about excellence? what does excellence mean? And finally, how do universities as centres of academic excellence promote a philosophy of education in society? The reply gives a similar insight into teaching philosophy in modern institutions to that provided by the reader of sociology above - also at a post-92 - but where the demographic of the student intake and mix is very different to this suburban London post-92 university which has many students who commute on a daily basis from the boroughs of West London to their lectures:

The word excellence is difficult in many ways. The roles of universities should be first, about the creation of new knowledge, I don't think it's a university if you are merely teaching perceived wisdom, but, at the undergraduate level you're not going to take anybody beyond that and you never have done and I don't think there's anything wrong with that<sup>186</sup>. But it's also about developing people intellectually and, with appropriate knowledge and skills such that they are more capable of contributing to a society and that's our ambition here, that we are educating people for a more sustainable society. I don't want people going out from here who just know the status quo and will live with it. Our mission is through what we teach and how we teach and how we to try and encourage people to find their own voice as a contributor, and with that passion and desire to drive towards a more fair and equitable society<sup>187</sup>. I think virtually every member of my staff is signed up to that mission, you could say that's brainwashing the students but I don't think so and we genuinely try to do that [teach to the mission]. We do not achieve it with all of them but that is what we are doing (Head of School of the Built Environment at suburban London post-92).

So emancipatory excellence – that is, liberating the individual through intellectual development which in turn democratises society is practised in this university through teaching however, according to the participant this is not necessarily measurable through traditional quality assurance exercises. Seen through the participant's eyes, it is a philosophical and moral principle of higher education which does not equate to simplistic measurements of quality and equations of value for money or the transferability of a degree in the labour market but a principle which genuinely sees students at the heart of the system and, first and foremost as people, not consumers.

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<sup>186</sup> Another participant said this when asked if they recognised the university experience of students as excellence defined as the emancipatory Hellenic ideal, giving a slightly different view of the development of students as potential researchers: I wouldn't so much define it as excellence although I understand your definition. What I would like is for everybody who is going through a university to be going through something that is to a degree a transformational experience, intellectually transformational. In other words, it takes them from as they are predominantly educated today, from dependent to independent learners, to self-starters, people who are able to go out and acquire data, analyse data, synthesis it, produce output that's either oral or written, that gives new insights, that takes them on a journey, makes them independent, more confident, that's what I want. That is an issue of two things. First is the education that they get at the place and the second is who they are educated with. And I think that's one of the things that really matters is that ... when I went to university what the transition was, was that you went from being a reasonable size fish in a very small pool to realising that when you went to university you weren't the most able in the classroom and that there were shedloads of people who were substantially more able than you – [and you thought] bloody hell, you better get your act together! So I think that peer group is essential (Vice-Chancellor and representative of Universities UK).

<sup>187</sup> Another participant said: of course we train students for the employment market but what we also hope to do is turn out students who are good citizens who contribute to making a good society (professor of Geography and the head of a big school at 1994 Robbins university)

In continuing now from the discussions above, and returning to the theme of competition, it is important to ask how the market in higher education might affect the direction of teaching, and indeed the institutions that do not attract investment and, crucially, moreover, what happens to fair access and participation in higher education. The dean of an arts and humanities faculty (Suburban London post-1992) quoted in the introduction to this thesis argued that the intended downgrading or demise of smaller and more modern universities was part of the ‘technocratic fix’ (*ibid*) to keep the cost of higher education down, although he also argued that it was in part ideological and (or) elitist, in the sense that some politicians felt the newer institutions did not really qualify as universities and so the sector could afford to lose them. However, another participant, a vice-chancellor of a post-92 when asked for his view of Coalition policy and what was driving it said there was not a single ideological driver behind the reforms and pointed to competition on an international, national and institutional basis as responsible for driving an incoherent mix of strategies:

I think the problem is there isn’t a single driver, and some of them are clearly in conflict. Certain universities probably sit closer to where that conflict creates difficulties than others. So, for example, there are clear national drivers around research, around international competitiveness. There are drivers around employability and there are financial drivers. Some of those are driving policy in different directions. I don’t think there is actually an overarching policy direction. I think what we’re seeing is policy making by advocacy and competition between different groups and different philosophies. So I don’t think there is actually within the Coalition a clear direction, in many ways (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

I think there are a variety of different advocacy groups within the university sector, within government, from Treasury. I think what we have is lack of clarity or certainty about overall direction. So, that plays out in fact, in a situation where you get policy statements which were often mutually exclusive and direction which is unclear. I don’t think actually it’s Machiavellian. I think it is simply that there is no sense of coherence at the moment about where the sector is going. So, for example, we have rhetoric about continued adherence to access and to widening participation and at the same time, activities which go against widening participation (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

Indeed, when asked why there was not a united voice representing the university at the time of the Coalition reforms, a professor of English and Cultural studies at a Russell Group

university said that universities and science and business ministers were ‘front-of-house’, monopolizing the stage and soliloquising about the changes made to how and why higher education is provided. In other words, occupying a space effectively vacated in the public sphere by universities for their own performance of the policies contained in the Browne Report and the White Paper (BIS: 2011). Asked if he thought that Universities UK and university leaders could have come out and defended the sector as one and opposed the changes in a unified stance he replied that ‘yes’, they could have done this but the reason they did not was ‘writ large’ in the existence of the mission groups, echoing the words of the vice-chancellor quoted immediately above (professor of English and Cultural studies at a Russell Group university).

And indeed, on this point, an emeritus professor of higher education made the following observations:

You haven’t heard any Russell Group vice-chancellor criticising the funding model. I think that they were delighted by it. The fact of the matter is, although nobody will admit it, this is a golden age for university finance: this is a golden age for institutions. Say courses in this building will run for about £5,500 per year. Yet the university is charging £9,000. You look at how many cranes there are on the campus and that’s the answer. Universities are now saying that they should be looking for a surplus. Because there’s so little capital money around from the government, people are saying, “Well, we should be looking for a surplus of 5% rather than 3%”. The extra 2% is about rebuilding and refurbishment of buildings and so forth. Universities are rolling in money at the moment. It’s all going to end. The bubble’s going to burst, by 2016, I would think, because the current funding system is unsustainable. Everybody’s going to be finishing up by charging nearly £9,000. The Treasury won’t be able to afford loaning that amount of money, unless there’s a fantastic change in the market place. They’ll have to trim somehow. Whether they do it on the amount of interest they charge, or whatever. The new government, whichever it is - they’re going to have to face up to some very sharp financial changes to make the system sustainable. At the moment, universities are in a wonderful position (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist).

Another participant (Vice-Chancellor and representative of Universities UK) said the reason the sector was quiet following the reforms was the serious and profound changes made to higher education which had led to an atomised system, in which the clear ‘individual narrative’ of institutions had come to the fore because of the dilemma created by the temporary increase in resource through the fee rise (providing opportunities for expansion in

bigger research intensive and science-led universities like his own) and the gradual reduction of the teaching grant which in smaller institutions meant focusing on strategies which would consolidate around finding cost effective student numbers. This, the participant suggested, might mean that a post-92 university would consolidate its position by taking less students with lower A-level grades, who are harder and thus more expensive to teach<sup>188</sup>, raising entry requirements and taking fewer but better students. The participant said that: ‘this would not be good for either the individual or society’ (Vice-Chancellor and representative of Universities UK). Indeed, in response to a question about the direction of his university post the Coalition reforms and if this meant a repositioning of his institution in the market as his university had moved from the Million+ group to the Alliance, the vice-chancellor of a post-92 said that:

So a lot of the presumed mobility around the AABs is a fiction. It’s very interesting to watch how that really plays out. Much of the rhetoric that’s been talked about the AABs I think is frankly nonsense. Because you look at the reality, how easy it is for universities to suddenly say ‘Okay, we’ll take another huge... We can attract all these AABs’? They can only do it, I think, in classroom based subject (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

So, for us, we’ve taken a deliberate, strategic decision to push up our tariffs, for a variety of reasons. Partly, because we have very high attrition rates. Although tariffs are a poor proxy, they are a proxy for preparedness, especially at the lower end or the cheaper end (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

So we have very high attrition rates. My view of participation is that we have a very proud record as being a university where almost half of our students are first generation entrants to the university and we don’t wish to change that. But, I don’t think there is value in admitting people to fail. So we wish to say that actually widening participation is not about getting people into university. It’s about getting people out of university; it’s about getting people from diverse backgrounds out. In order to do that successfully I think we need to be a bit more rigorous about our admissions (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

So we’re raising the bar and putting in more support so we can better support those students that we do admit. One of the problems is that we have large numbers of students who it costs a lot to support, who then drop out. That

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<sup>188</sup> See Amoah (2007:115) for same view expressed by ‘a professor of social policy at ‘new’ university.



means we have less resource available to support those who might be able to stay (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

So for various reasons we're raising the bar and probably deliberately shrinking the university. Now that's quite a high risk thing to do at a time when there are lots of other pressures that might cause the university to shrink. We're raising the bar at a time when there may be fewer students of a type with sufficient entry requirements around. And at a time when the university's reputation is not as high as it should be. That's a high risk approach. If you look critically at its place in the league tables, whether you like league tables or not, they're telling you something. It's steadily slid over the last eight years. Things like National Student Survey outcomes are poor (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

So the Coalition reforms have caused universities who are unable to compete for students outside the quota to cut their cloth in order to restrict resource, improve their outcomes and so their ratings in a bid to maintain reputation and thus viability. The denial of access to the potential talent of society because of this is discussed shortly. Firstly though, the response of this vice-chancellor to a direct question asking if the repositioning of his university had anything to do with his decision to move from the Million+ Group to the Alliance Group is illuminating:

A little bit. I'm not a great fan (*sic*). I have ambivalent feelings about the mission groups in any case. They do have some value in that it is useful to have a bunch of people you go and talk to about common problems. Certainly moving to the Alliance was partly about repositioning the university in that sense and saying unfortunately, the Million+ does happen to carry a label that makes people think they're teaching only, volume universities (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-1992b).

So it might be possible to surmise from this that this vice-chancellor was attempting to protect his university, which he described as research-led, from a future as a teaching only institution (and as implied, one of perceived low quality due to its intake), and from what has been argued is a likely consequence of the Coalition's market reforms. The end of a unified system which incorporates teaching and research in its institutions to one which is divided into academic and utilitarian, the consequence of which, it is argued by participants of this research project, would be the denial of access to the full potential of the university to the more disadvantaged in society. More disadvantaged students tend to attend their local

institutions which are often post-92s where entry requirements are lower<sup>189</sup> and living at home is cheaper. In fact, the White Paper (BIS: 2011; 5.8) set out to have the opposite effect to this and states that: ‘To help make progress in the numbers of young people entering higher education from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in particular to the most selective universities, we are establishing a new framework, which places more responsibility on universities and colleges to widen participation’ (BIS: 2011; 5.8)<sup>190</sup>. A participant at a post-92 said that there was a very messy line between widening participation, social mobility and simply expanding the numbers in HE<sup>191</sup>. With regard to the movement away from the Million+ group described by the vice-chancellor above and the social mobility agenda of the Coalition, he said this:

But that’s a different agenda from saying that you’re interested in social justice or social inequality, and addressing the roots of that. It’s about taking the best kids out of one class group in order to maintain the status quo by augmenting the middle class with new talent. So you keep the same social structure. You retain inequality, you standardise inequality as a consequence of this. That’s what the whole social mobility agenda is about, rather than addressing social inequality. The two things are not the same ... It doesn’t mean bright kids go to Oxford, it’s that you won’t get kids to go anywhere full stop. You’re killing the whole thing (Dean of arts and humanities, suburban London post-92).

And on this point a registrar at a Russell Group university said that the splintering of the sector along the lines of the old binary system was likely following the Coalition reforms:

I don’t think you’ll get many arts, softer social science degrees in the post-92<sup>192</sup> sector in five, six years-time, I really don’t – we’ll be fine - so they’ll change

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<sup>189</sup> See Vignoles (2013: 116-7) for argument that significant gaps in educational achievement emerge early on in young people from lower socio-economic groups and that they already face a range of other barriers which deter them from applying and accessing HE, including now, for example, the removal of the educational maintenance allowance by the Coalition which helped young people prior to application by encouraging study in further education. Degree choices (determined by institution attended) also significantly affect income and so life-chances (Vignoles: 2013; 121).

<sup>190</sup> The framework refers to an agreement set out in the White Paper (2011: 5.8) whereby all institutions are to ensure widening participation remains a key objective and to produce widening participation strategic assessments.

<sup>191</sup> The cap on student numbers has of course now been completely removed and in principle this means that anyone who has the ability can apply and go to university. The way in which institutions may adapt or be forced to change in response to this is discussed above, as are the implications for widening participation and access to all the institutions in the system.

<sup>192</sup> Another participant when asked about the likely effects of Coalition policy on post-92s and social mobility said this: If you live in a terraced house in Redcar and nobody in your family has been to higher education before and you go to Teeside and you do a law degree and you become a para-legal and you relocate yourself to Yarm and you bring up your family there, then you’ve undergone a

character a little, what that will do for further education, I really don't know. We're very elitist here ... .. elitism's never gone away, it's just been redefined (Registrar, Russell Group university).

Researcher's question: So you will have richer members of society going to 'proper' universities and so you will have this almost tripartite division with the sector? (i.e. the academic, the vocational and the utilitarian?) (*emphasis added*)

I find it hard to argue against that, and that's going to be largely because the richer, the more privileged, the ones who want to do the arts and humanities degrees will come probably from middle-class backgrounds and because the only institutions that are doing those degrees in a great way will be the Russell Group and leading members of the 1994 Group (Registrar, Russell Group university).

Researcher's question: So it's a cultural thing? Only middle-class kids are interested in the arts and humanities?

Well speaking anecdotally only, I'm not speaking empirically, but I'm trying to think about where I grew up and people and friends and so on ... I think that's probably right, you know, if you're living in urban areas, Lancashire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and you're going to your local or regional university then primarily you're going to do professionally related, vocationally related courses in radiography, in business studies, in applied science and so on and I think that's probably what families expect. Other families with professional parents and where you are interested in philosophy, politics and history then your family will be quite happy for you to do that (Registrar, Russell Group university).

It is of course equally possible to argue that the young people from the demographic backgrounds the registrar describes are as interested in the arts and humanities and social sciences as those from any other walk of life. Thus it is also possible to deduce from the conversations above that if young people were unable to access the degree courses they especially wanted to take to develop their lives at their local university or access it at all because of revised grade entry requirements then excellence would be potentially denied to

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transformational experience. So the first start is Teesside taking to Yarm and then, for the children, they say it's not Teesside for you, it's Durham or Manchester or even Oxford or Cambridge. That's why I think post-92's are so important (Vice-Chancellor and representative of Universities UK).

those with talent. However, a former vice-chancellor and widening participation leader said that despite the ideology and incoherence of Coalition policy, its unintended consequences and the undoubted elitism of some of its politicians, that there was a fundamental and genuine belief in government in a meritocracy and in social mobility and that this was evidenced by the support he had received in his position as a leader for widening participation, despite being an outspoken critic of the Coalition reforms. He went on to say that this government like past administrations: ‘recognises that wherever there is potential in society then those people need to be encouraged to strive to achieve through higher education’<sup>193</sup> and that:

It is recognised that you cannot in any sense afford to ignore the potential of any part of the population: excellence exists across the spectrum of wealth and disadvantage. This is the central thesis of fair access (former vice-chancellor at post-1992 University and widening participation leader).

Echoing the words of the dean quoted above in which he voiced concerns over the maintenance of the status quo, this participant went on to say that whenever excellence has been ignored, that is when access to higher education has been restricted to an elite, that:

When the intelligentsia becomes restricted to a particular class group then we have seen what has happened to societies where that has happened in the past, those societies do not grow, the ideas in them are not challenged because everybody comes from the same background and the same assumptions are made and it’s a disaster. This is our biggest challenge to excellence (former vice-chancellor at post-1992 University and widening participation leader).

He went on to say that:

Universities are incredibly resilient. The students and graduates are even more resilient. Excellence will survive (former vice-chancellor at post-1992 University, widening participation leader).

So it can be argued from the participants’ responses presented above that excellence survives post the Browne Review and White Paper (BIS: 2011) but that access to a liberating experience found in academic subjects may be restricted to certain types of institution and

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<sup>193</sup> See Vignoles (2013: 112) for discussion on widening participation who points to the chapter in the White Paper (BIS 2011) dedicated to this and which reaffirms the government’s commitment to increasing the chances of disadvantaged young people relative to their peers: Vignoles argues that this commitment implies an acknowledgement that those from lower socio-economic groups have witnessed a decline their chances of entering HE in recent years.

that this is a direct consequence of Coalition policy, unintended or otherwise. Evidence suggests (Callender: 2013) that participation rates for lower socio-economic groups have not fallen due to the fees rise. However, access to the most selective universities, as the White Paper (BIS: 2011; 5. 8) acknowledges and from the evidence of the participants cited here is still difficult and will become more so for those from poorer backgrounds in society<sup>194</sup>. However, it should be noted that the head of the school of the built environment at the post-92 who was quoted above as a participant in this research, represents a local university which is very much engaged with the local community and prides itself on enabling its students to find professional and vocational work locally and nationally whilst developing them through a philosophy of excellence. Excellence is a facet of all types of institutions then, not just the solely academic and is not separate from economic society. Indeed, this is also the case with the university represented by the reader in sociology which prides itself on its community engagement and the success of its graduates in the world of work and this engagement can be discerned in another extract from the reader at the end of this chapter, shortly. However, a short quote now from the vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review whose university is primarily geared to science, technology and business also illustrates the interaction between excellence in the academy and economic society. During the interview the vice-chancellor had emphasised the importance of language to graduates who enter the business world and to the national economy but also to cultural understanding and individual development:

We're a university that doesn't have any kind of art, sort of decorative kind of creative stuff, but we do have a whole series of engineering product design courses, but they're very product design focused, slightly kind of utilitarian in a

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<sup>194</sup> A participant said this about access to English higher education: I have no problem with elitism as long as those able to be elite have equal access to the elitist organisations, where we fall down is we have prioritised access to those elitist organisations, independent schools for example [pause] people from particular social classes etc., etc. I have no problem with high performing places where high performing people go, to where they're pulled and stretched and given the kind of attributes that may make them the leaders of society in the future, but there must be equality of access to those institutions and that's the problem with British society, that now there's an almost fossilized inequality of access. I have no problem with the Russell Group saying that they 'we are the research intensive universities' [*participant's emphasis added*], what I do have a problem with is the sense that the Russell Group starts making out the rest are crap (*sic*) (Vice-chancellor and representative of Universities UK).

way if you like, in a nice sense of the word. One of our students is in the top four in the young designer's competition in London – I'm blown away by that - these are amazing young people! Some of them are not so young but this one happens to be young. The large majority of them [the students] take a placement year which typically is either overseas or indeed, increasingly they're in overseas in business so they're doing their business and language at the same time (Vice-Chancellor and member of the Browne Review).

The concluding section of this chapter has attempted to place the Coalition reforms in the context of the lifeworld of the university and to present what excellence means to just some of those who inhabit it. The responses of the participants represented above serve as a critique of Coalition policy and a repost to the philosophy of competition which from the evidence of the research material presented threatens the sustainability of a unified English higher education system and by consequence, the extension of excellence to all. This discussion is continued in the final chapter of this thesis, next, when more conceptualisations of excellence are presented and juxtaposed with the political discourse of excellence: the economic imperative, competition and competitiveness for the sake of success in the global race. That discussion will begin by centring on the Research Excellence Framework and the relationship of this to the lifeworld of the university. Through this final discussion, the public presentation of higher education and excellence will be discussed through research interview material which is designed to open a communicative space for a consensus on the liberating principle of the university. To conclude this chapter and to prepare an introduction for the next, a participant's response to the notion of the increasing instrumentalism of higher education is now represented:

I just think late modernity/high modernity – whatever we're going to call it requires at some level an instrumentalization of the individual, and it's a big fight really to go against this, so when I'm writing references for people I'm writing about transferable skills just as much discipline skills, I'm writing about the sorts of skills that they've developed that will be help them in the work place as well as the analytical skills and all of those things which are disciplinary and, transferable. But the idea of university... ... and down the road obviously... I delivered summer courses there and sat in some of the Don's offices, where really you could imagine just sitting and having a think in that old style blue-skies thinking or not even that, just thinking space, (*sic*) whereas here, I think if you were to ask my colleagues everyone would be saying we're teaching too much, there's a lot of teaching going on we're also supposed to be producing excellent research and some of us are supposed to be doing impact work and demonstrating that and so the demands of what the

university is have absolutely increased and changed<sup>195</sup>. I think there are a lot of ideological people still populating the universities at the staff level, the students just haven't had the time to develop that ... but I think the idea of what the university was like, it's just much more instrumental. I think the introduction of the REF is really interesting which is another great big topic, really because it concerns me the way in which they're directing people to publish in certain places and counting particular academic activities over others and I think there's going to be a huge amount of stress over the next eighteen months as people find out if they're going to be returned, not returned. (Reader in sociology, post-92)

So the lifeworld of the university is called upon by the demands and interests of the state, bureaucracy and economic society but how do these interests coincide with those of higher education (and indeed, society) and how does excellence as the liberating principle survive in an increasingly instrumental world of change and uncertainty? Indeed, how does the lifeworld itself survive this intrusion? The following and final chapter attempts to answer these questions in attempting to demonstrate that excellence is still a liberating principle of English higher education. Indeed, this chapter has attempted to argue through a critical discourse analysis of three major reports on higher education that the ideal of excellence was and remains a legitimating principle of the university, although the political discourses of the 'knowledge society' and the 'global race' and thus the emphasis on competitiveness tend to

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<sup>195</sup> Later in the interview this participant was asked: How do you see what seem to be the constant changes and interference in higher education over the years – can we see it as part of the evolution of the university and have there been some positive unintended consequences that have come from political changes?

'At one level you could look at the whole theory of late modernity and rapid transformations and all those things and the shift to individualization and the self, and the project of the self and all of those things, you could look at that theoretically, and think actually, we can see some instrumental changes in the university as sitting more comfortably if you accept those other changes. So I think that evolution in terms of the university has been [pause] we've gone through a more rapid period of changes than at other times previously - I mean women didn't used to go to university for example, just all of those things. My fear is that things like sociology and other disciplines, is that people become more and more strategic about what they take. I think again, all of that stuff is what's going to emerge over the next few years ... we've recruited again this year, that's great but, what is going to be the longer term impact, I really don't know, I mean I think that people will potentially vote with their feet because the idea of going to study a degree which isn't tied to a particular job at the end is going to become (pause), people can't be that unstrategic (*sic*) and actually people need to be doing economics and something that's going to lead to accountancy and all of those kind of things and that's going to be seen as a sensible way to proceed and the idea of going away and doing three years of thinking and developing, all of that's going to be – lost' (Reader in sociology, post-92).

The issue of combining the instrumental idea of the university with its more traditional ideas, liberal and emancipatory for a successful economic and participatory society is addressed through another participant's responses in the next and final chapter.

reduce its visibility in discourse, and increasingly so after the Browne Report and White Paper (BIS: 2011).



## Chapter six

Thus this final chapter concludes the thesis by reaffirming excellence as a legitimating principle of English higher education and argues that the values of the university are in principal at least, symmetrical with those of wider society and the state. That is to say, the values of individual and collective freedom and equality would be synonymous with national and individual prosperity in a society which increasingly embraced social democracy - encouraged by engagement with emancipatory excellence. Thus in following on from the discussions in the previous chapter, which in part focused on the connections between higher education, the individual and thus societal development, it also argues that emancipatory excellence and economic society are not mutually exclusive. Whilst arguing that emancipatory excellence is the driving force of higher education it also argues that this principle is not recognised as such, and is subordinated in discourse to the economic imperative. The chapter attempts to demonstrate this through a critique of the REF, in which it further argues that the values and the work, that is the real inquiry – the research of the university - is conflated with an inter- institutional status competition for the concentration of resource, geared to national economic success and, moreover, the positioning of English universities at the pinnacle of the league of international excellence (Sayer: 2014). The chapter does not however attempt to give its own expansive or definitive account of the historical development of the research assessment exercises or the precise details of the REF, but relies on other's accounts, including research participants, to provide an overview<sup>196</sup>. However, in giving an overview of the exercise and put simply, the REF is designed to assess quality research and distribute £1.6 billion pounds worth of funding. It is estimated that the REF has cost institutions up to £46 million in preparing and polishing

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<sup>196</sup> See Brown and Carraso (2013: 47) for an expansive historical and technical account of the research assessment exercises from 1986 to 2013.

their submissions.<sup>197</sup> The research assessment exercises have run approximately every six years since 1986 and are a source of prestige and funding as well as controversy.<sup>198</sup>

The chapter also supports the final subsidiary and supporting argument of the thesis, that is, that the ideal speech situation for higher education would be the scientific-public validation of excellence through which the values and purpose of the university could be freely discussed. To support the argument that the Research Excellence Framework as an assessment exercise is unrepresentative of excellence and higher education in general, the chapter begins with a lengthy but informative extracts from research interviews with first, a professor of English and Cultural Studies followed by a piece from the vice-chancellor of a 'research intensive' institution and member of the dominant Russell Group. The chapter then moves on to a critical analysis of the REF informed by Sayer's (2014) *Rank Hypocrisies: An Insult to the REF*<sup>199</sup>. Sayer's work picks up on some of the sentiments articulated by the reader in sociology at the end of the previous chapter and this section is designed to develop and support the argument that while the economic imperative intrudes into the lifeworld of the university its colonisation is far from complete, although the chapter also represents research material which reveals the darker disciplinary side of the REF, and indeed the NSS. This particular material focuses on how the RAE and NSS are used in institutional reorganisation.

The specific use of this material is intended to further illustrate and support the argument that the resource and status ranking competition is antithetical to excellence. This argument was first developed in the previous chapter with regard to the potential of Coalition policy to damage access and participation and the role of modern post-92's in this. However, research material will also suggest that the research assessment exercise has had

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<sup>197</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2014/dec/17/ref-2014-why-is-it-such-a-big-deal>. Also: See REF official website: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/about/>

<sup>198</sup> See Lucas (2006) *The Research Game in Academic Life* for excellent study into its effects in some English universities.

<sup>199</sup> See: Times Higher Education for expansive guide on REF 2014 including article by Sayer: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/research-excellence-framework-ref-2014>  
See again: Times Higher Education for article on the evolution of the research assessment exercise. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/evolution-of-the-ref/2008100.article>

positive effects in the past - not least for modern institutions, and moreover, that the contentiousness surrounding ‘impact’<sup>200</sup>, one of the three assessed elements of the REF is well deserved as this is also revealed through the responses of one participant to be positive, in terms of submission to the exercise and, in a terms of extending and applying the socio-political mission of sociology in and to society. This is followed by research interview material which is again presented to support the argument that excellence is the legitimating principle of the English university but moreover, to support the argument that this is not acknowledged publicly as such, and that a communicative space in which the interests of higher education and social science are discussed with those of the public would allow for the presentation of emancipatory excellence. This would, theoretically, then, legitimate excellence as a principle of English higher education. To an extent, the thesis critiques and interrogates the research interview material presented within this chapter, however, the responses of the participants are positioned in such a way that at times they provide an implicit critique of each other. The contradictions revealed there serve to demonstrate that different views exist within the lifeworld of the university with regard to competition and research and, importantly, differing views on what excellence in this context means and how it is achieved.

So the chapter begins now with a critique of the research assessment exercise per se.

This critique comes from within the lifeworld of the university and is made first by a

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<sup>200</sup> ‘Impact’ refers to the element of the REF which measures the cultural and economic impact of academic research. The inclusion of this element in the assessment exercise has been much criticised as it is seen as directing research toward some end that is, making research applicable and thus distracting from blue skies, free thinking unfettered research. Moreover, it has been seen as directing the university toward the cultural and economic goals of the state. However, it is also argued that ‘impact’ gives the university the opportunity to first, show how its activities relate to society, making the political case for higher education and second, to discuss with the members of that society what interests they consider worthy of inquiry. These following links to the THE demonstrate these different views, indeed, the last link shows how impact is highly relevant to one academic although this interest brought her into conflict with the public:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/who-benefits-from-the-impact-agenda/2016732.article>

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/the-impact-of-impact/2018540.article>

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/the-dark-side-of-the-impact-agenda/2017299.article>

professor at a Russell Group university, this is then followed by the responses of a vice-chancellor. This second participant had been asked about the concentration of resource in the sector and how this might affect the newer universities in the future, and how well excellence was represented through the research assessment exercises. The interviews were conducted after the Coalition reforms but before the inaugural REF exercise was completed: The first extract gives a historical view of research assessment and the participant concerned presents a political perspective on the rationale for the establishment of the RAE, indeed, the participant presents a withering critique of the exercise now and then, in terms of its implementation and, its value: The participant had originally been asked about competition in English higher education and if there was any connection with privatization of research or even of institutions:

If you think what this means with what we now call the Research Excellence Framework for example, that was first introduced back in 1986 and this was first mooted as the research selectivity exercise and the idea behind it was very clear, the government would refuse to fund research in all the existing institutions at that point and what it was looking for was a legitimate way of selecting institutions, so the research selectivity exercise very quickly became the research assessment exercise, because it would be too controversial to say (*sic*) but fundamentally that exercise is an exercise in legitimising the cutting of state funding for research and what better way to do it than not do it by the government, but to get us to do it ourselves, so a system called peer-review where the government can stand back and say 'our hands are clean' it's you lot who've decided' – as did we in the English literature institution - we famously shot ourselves in the foot because we were quite stringent with ourselves so the English profile didn't score very highly, meanwhile Classics departments all up and down the country were rating themselves as excellent and they got lots and lots of funding and they began to grow, again, in that period. So as an exercise it seems to be absolutely in refusing to fund (*sic*). I don't know if it's determined as an exercise that is supposed to lead to privatisation, I think it's fundamentally [pause] the government (and this applies to governments of each persuasion) lacks the political will to make the case for funding higher education, for funding research in this instance in higher education, and it lacks that political will for a number of reasons because one, it's trying to cut taxation for everybody, because no one likes paying taxes, and it is also determined to dress this up as something that is part of a so-called efficiency drive as if we were somehow inefficient back in the 60s, 70s, the 80s<sup>201</sup> and we really needed

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<sup>201</sup> The participant related efficiency to past cuts made to higher education and in particular to the unit of resource, an efficiency drive which he argued began in earnest in the early 1980s under the Conservative administration of Margaret Thatcher. Cuts to higher education in the guise of efficiency savings have been made ever since. See Brown (2010:3) who was writing just before the Coalition came to power in 2010 and shows how the then Secretary of State in the then DIUS was making preparations for reductions in the university budget – due to the latest global economic recession. Although as Brown points out, the situation with regard to the unit of resource was in part in reverse

a good shot in the arm and were somehow were going to be made more efficient by research assessment - well we're certainly more productive in the sense that we produce an awful lot of stuff, but just look at the data, in terms of what gets read, and there's a huge amount of stuff that's published and goes unread, all the scholarly articles just go unread, nobody reads them, nobody bothers with them but they're published and that's the important thing and that's pointless, that's not efficient, that's just a waste of everybody's time, money and paper or internet space ... .. (professor of English and Cultural Studies, Russell Group university).

So the participant, although failing to explicitly state a solution to the funding of research excellence in higher education, makes the case that the funding of research in higher education should come from the state but that this is not possible because of the political considerations surrounding raising revenue for that and because we are in an era in which the ideology of efficiency, the current economic imperative, has entered into the lifeworld of the university<sup>202</sup> which is characterised by getting people to do things (Habermas, in Fairclough: 1992; 7). An era in which the university itself decides what is and is not good research and where this is done in order to assuage and ameliorate the budgetary concerns of the state. This is of course a partial, indeed, perhaps arguably, a partisan view. However, the following extract presents an equally withering critique of the research assessment exercise and the question which naturally follows from these negative portraits of one the most important aspects of the university lifeworld, is how would what higher education does in terms of research and knowledge acquisition be better represented in the future. That is to say, how would this aspect of excellence in the university be measured and conveyed to give a clearer representation of the activity of the university lifeworld? The chapter continues to develop this question and line of thinking in order to produce an argument for the public presentation of excellence. First however, we can hear another view of research assessment given by a leading vice-chancellor.

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due to the advent of the fee rise under New Labour. Also see: Universities UK report on current efficiency savings targets:

[http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/EfficiencyReport2015.aspx#.VS0bA\\_zF\\_uQ](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/EfficiencyReport2015.aspx#.VS0bA_zF_uQ)

<sup>202</sup> More radical suggestions which propose the ending of research assessment exercises per se and indeed the national student survey and which favour a return to academic integrity to oversee the quality and direction of research is to be found in *The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance* (2011) by Bailey and Freedman (Eds.)

I have long and publicly stated that you know, that I hold almost no faith whatsoever in the research assessment exercise right, and attribution is given to the research assessment exercise as if it has somehow been the cause of the increasing research excellence in this country right, without any objective evidence ever supplied whatsoever, to show me that's the case. I would argue that ... first of all, the very best research environment in the world doesn't need a research assessment exercise, it's called the United States of America, so it's not as though everywhere else has suddenly burdened itself with this to improve... secondly the improvement in our research output is to do with the top 10% being cited more and more it's not to do with an over-all increase in research excellence, I argue that because of the complexity of the research and the cost of the research that you would have seen concentration of research particularly in the physical and biological and bio-medical sciences, whether there had been a research exercise or not. And I'll give you an example. We are spending £54 million to build a new biological sciences building right. Our biological sciences are housed in a building that is completely unfit for purpose it cannot be re-furbered (*sic*) to give them a decent environment. The point is that there are only so many universities that can write a cheque for £54 million pounds right, and had we not been able to write a cheque then we would have had to stop doing biological sciences. So what happens is that there's an inevitable concentration of these kind of expensive sciences into those universities which frankly can afford to be in the game. I think if you look at the 1992 submission to the RAE for chemistry and if you compare it with the 2008 submission for chemistry to the RAE you will see that the one in 2008 is half the number of places submitting in 1992. There is just an inevitable - crunching financial, logistical, equipment based thing that you will get a concentration (Vice-chancellor and representative of Universities UK).

That doesn't work in the social sciences and that doesn't necessarily work in the arts and humanities and my feeling is that the argument that you should see research concentration in those disciplines is far less valid. And of course you haven't seen it. That's the point, in spite of the RAE, you still haven't seen it, there are a hundred psychology departments or whatever it is in the country - because they're not driven by the same resource implications that the big sciences are, and so many of the universities you talk about [post-92s] that are in inverted commas not 'research intensive' will still be able to inquire and research in those areas that are not resource intensive. And I think that the name of the game in those circumstances is to identify those within your university and play to those strengths - two or three that you might have as areas of intellectual inquiry rather than just education ... I don't think you're going to get an absolutist breakdown into teaching, only except probably at the HE/FE end and the private end ... (Vice-chancellor and representative of Universities UK).

So this participant argued that the reason for the concentration of resource in certain institutions was historical. The richer universities have the established logistical and equipment base but most importantly have the resources to keep research facilities to the standard required to support research, particularly in the natural sciences. Newer universities

simply do not have the financial resources or the facilities to compete. The participant also argued that the metric system (introduced in 2008) in which numbers of citations are used to assess research quality is not only unrepresentative of a research development but is not the driver of outstanding or excellent quality research and/or outputs. The participant fails to suggest however what must be an obvious solution to addressing the unrepresentativeness of research both in terms of the methodology of the exercise or with regard to representation of excellence in research across the sector. It is clear that in order to promote research across the sector it would be necessary first, to resource all institutions equally and secondly, to prioritise the social sciences and arts and humanities in the same way the natural sciences and technology are giving them the same prestige. Instead, however, this participant seems at least content to live with the status quo and suggests that the smaller less well-off institutions should find ‘two or three’ (*ibid*) areas of intellectual inquiry to concentrate on instead, and implies that otherwise the concentration of these institutions will be solely on education, presumably by this they mean they will become teaching only institutions. And this comes after the participant has suggested that resource concentration in the social sciences and arts and humanities is less necessary than in the biological sciences because the resource implications are not the same. In leaving the cost of laboratory equipment aside, others might disagree and argue that is where the investment should lie if we are to continue have an active citizenry and democracy (Nussbaum: 2010) Thus it is apposite at this juncture to set out through another extract from the interview with the professor of English and Cultural Studies represented above earlier, a perspective on how and why the English higher education system has developed as it has, seemingly into two differentiated sectors within one ostensibly unified system. This participant’s response follows on logically from the vice-chancellor’s above, in that it again emphasises the research that existed in the post-92s, before the end of the binary divide, research which the vice-chancellor above suggests still exists but was outside the orbit of the then RAE: The professor of English and Cultural Studies was asked what he thought was the rationale underpinning the decision to end the binary line in 1992:

I was working overseas at the time but I was aware of what was going on here and I remember discussing it with colleagues there and saying, there's only one reason for this and that is to reduce the funding for universities down to the level of the polys. By blurring the so-called binary divide and funding everyone equally it was abundantly clear to me that they weren't going suddenly raise the levels of funding for the polys to match that of the universities. It was again an economic gesture that was designed to legitimise the cutting of funding for universities and the wider dispersal of that money... But in terms of what the polytechnic was, the polytechnic begins as an excellent kind of institution in my view. But, it undergoes all sorts of changes – I'm not on secure ground here because I haven't researched this enough – but my impression of what happened is that again really during the late 70s, into the early 80s in particular, there were a whole load of people who would usually have got jobs in universities as they were doing academic disciplines like mine - English - but they couldn't<sup>203</sup> - the polys were doing rather well and they were in expansion mode and one demand that they were speaking to, was among many other things, was demand for work in the field of non-material but cultural activity and so they begin to open, not English departments as such, but language departments because that's important for business, cultural studies departments because that becomes important, anthropology, and those kind of social anthropology studies and lots of people who were doing (quotes, unquotes) 'university style research' find themselves getting a job (because there were no jobs in the universities) in the polys, so by the time you get to 1992 there's a hell of a lot of activity going in the polys that resembles what's going on in the universities. In fact, there's some activity going on in the polys that's a damn site better than what's going on in the universities – because some universities think we're a little bit stayed then [at that time]. And so there's no good reason anymore for having two different types of institution, it's just that if you look at them on a spectrum, the polys tended to be slightly more towards the vocational end of activity while the universities tended to be slightly more towards the academic end of activity with the exception of medicine and law and maybe even theology. But I'm not convinced there was any real serious thinking through about what was going when John Patten brings this change about in 1992, other than the economic question that they had two differentially funded sectors and they needed to equalise the two (*sic*)... the polys were doing however, a terrific, terrific job in my view but they were not afforded the kind of cultural authority and respect the universities were... (professor of English and Cultural Studies, Russell Group university).

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<sup>203</sup> Similarly, a participant at a post-92 when asked if there had been a fundamental change in 1992 that: 'I don't think so no, because in many way the polytechnics had become in the course of the 1980s pretty much like universities anyway. They were effectively awarding their own degrees, there was never the distinction as there was in other countries, by level, between universities and other institutions, you could always do a doctorate in a polytechnic, I mean going way back to the 20s or earlier, it would have been a kind of external London thing but anyway, so I think the way that they had evolved particularly in the 1980s, (*sic*) I think the crucial thing was actually the 1981 cuts, the UGC cuts which then restricted growth in traditional universities and a lot of the growth then spilled over into the polytechnics, so many of the people that I think in the 70s who would have gone to a university, actually in the 1980s they ended up in the polytechnics, I'm thinking of students and of staff, crucially staff you see, so I think the transformation actually took place in the 1980s and the 1992 thing was just a kind recognition of this. And actually it made very little difference' (Vice-chancellor, suburban London post-92a, and professor of higher education)



So this participant presents the argument that the polytechnics were engaged in research prior to 1992 which was of equal if not superior quality to that of the universities, indeed, in the same way that the vice-chancellor in the previous extract made the case that research in the social sciences is not presently recognised, this participant points to their importance in terms of professional advancement but also to the lifeworld of higher education . And from the responses represented so far, the driver of the research concentration in terms of resource and visibility in the sector is funding or rather, the distribution of this by the state which is mediated through competition between the institutions of English higher education and that this has deprived the newer institutions of resource and status. However, other participants held more favourable views of the assessment exercises. Indeed, the following extract tells a positive story about the RAE and in particular, with regards to its effects on modern universities and, academic behaviour which the participant put down to the competitive instinct.

For example, Middlesex University have got a flood research unit. Jolly valuable. They've got four or five people in it. They're concentrated on it. It's quite a buoyant little research group. It's different to what you find at Imperial College. Whatever people wanted to get out of the RAE and concentration, what's actually happened is that the RAE has had the effect of spreading research and is being simply a challenge to a lot of able people who have gone into new universities, who are saying, 'we want to get some money out of the RAE. We've got some facilities. The university has given us some money. We'll develop some research'. New fields of research have come along. My view is that the RAE is really quite successful (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist).

Researcher: This is almost like the liberal philosophy of higher education isn't it? That it's actually stimulated knowledge for its own sake?

It's in the way that it's competition. If you start, as I've done, recruiting staff, you'll find some people will be really pleased to be invited to come to [a Robbins university]. Others will be thinking, I'll really hold back because I want to get into Imperial or Oxbridge' That's the same lower down as well. People think to themselves, 'De Montfort are offering me X amount of research money and very little teaching. I'll try De Montfort and I can build up a research group', etc. A lot of it is to do with the research urge of most academics. What the RAE has done, actually, is free quite a lot of it. The RAE has done some damage as well. Forcing people for publications over five years (*sic*). All those sorts of things are absolutely correct, but statistically, it looks as if the RAE has

been beneficial to British research (Emeritus professor of higher education and policy specialist).

So according to this participant the research assessment exercise has helped stimulate the naturally competitive research instinct of academics and this has benefitted the newer and smaller institutions as researchers look for a niche in a particular institution. Moreover, that whatever the original rationale for implementation of the RAE, for example the concentration of research and resource, the unintended consequence has in fact been the diffusion of research across the sector. So what can be said from this participant's response is that research excellence occurs across the sector, despite the concentration of resource and the status and prestige which is attributed by the official rankings<sup>204</sup> to the elite institutions. However, and more importantly, what we might also say is that this is not publicly represented as a major aspect of higher education. That is, that the research of the university fuelled by the competitive spirit or not, goes unrepresented as major element of emancipatory or progressive excellence (This competitive aspect of higher education and the connection of this to the emancipatory role of excellence is discussed in conclusion to this chapter). Research may be initially driven by competition if this participant is correct in this view, however the application of this is often for the greater good as the next extract will attempt to demonstrate. The next participant was asked how they felt about the REF and specifically, impact:

Well it fits my work really well, so on a personal level you know, I mean I'm flavour of the month because I got a good impact statement. But I think we can't –again this is one of the dangers of generalising – how in philosophy do people, or it's much more difficult in some disciplines to demonstrate impact whereas in mine I can look at guidelines that have been introduced and link to research and things like that that I've done or policy (*sic*). So you know, I just think for some disciplines it fits very well, it's much clearer to make those links, in others it's much, much harder. So at a personal level, it fits with what I do but we shouldn't be sort of rushing to generalise something like impact at every discipline (Reader in sociology, post-92).

It was put to the participant that the research councils have always directed research to some end. This was their reply.

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<sup>204</sup> The 2008 RAE is said to have demonstrated these 'pockets' of 'islands' of excellence in the newer universities. See: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/reversal-of-fortunes/405690.article>

Increasingly – yep – making an application to a research council increasingly, you have to show that you’re working with stakeholders, that you’re involving a whole lot of people even at the very beginning of the process I think that the idea is that you keep them all in and at some level you demonstrate an outcome from your research has had benefit. But I think in lots of ways – I think it’s – in lots of ways – it’s how you define benefit and how that is going to be determined – in my areas there’s relatively straightforward ways of measuring it. My work was used in the introduction of the HPV vaccine at the WHO so I had guidelines then that I could point to. The fatherhood book I’ve helped in the policy document on (*sic*) I absolutely appreciate that there are other areas where it is much, much harder or at least what we define as impact I think or as benefit to others or whatever, I think, again, this is the first time round ... .. (*sic*) it will be interesting to see what the fallout is (Reader in sociology, post-92).

So the emancipatory aspect of excellence can be seen through this example to be encompassed in the requirement for impact, at least for some academics, if not for others. And through this example, the university extends its liberating mission into the wider world and is intimately connected with the work of the state and the international community and crucially, and through its engagement with stakeholders and others, and perhaps arguably, it brings excellence into conversation with the interests of society, but however, and as is argued by this participant and others represented above and below, it has deleterious effects on the lifeworld of the university. But what are the effects of competition driven by the need for the recognition in research excellence and institutional status via the rankings?: the next participant to be quoted said the following before discussing how he had gone about improving his university’s performance ratings in the course of a restructuring of his institution. This participant was quoted at the outset of this thesis, when the argument was made that the economic imperative eclipsed emancipatory excellence and this ideal was in danger of being lost to a simplistic interpretation of excellence which refers simply to the winners of a domestic and international rankings competition which is dependent on resource. Indeed, this participant acknowledges this in the course of his responses: ‘Our income from the funding councils is very limited, most of our money comes from the public sector, much more so than a Russell Group university’ (Vice-chancellor of 1994 Group

university). <sup>205</sup>The participant was asked the following question: Did you have a specific remit when you took on the role of vice-chancellor?

To stop the university slipping down the league tables. It wasn't put like that but it was pretty obvious that over the last 10-15 years the university had been on the decline. If you look at any of the indicators and look at [participant refers to a Russell Group university] and look at this university, they were doing this [participant uses gesture to indicate upward movement] and we were doing that [participant uses gesture to signal downward movement]. If you look at what we now regard as the key performance indicators for a higher education institution, increasing contract grant income, pretty good RAE scores, pretty good NSS scores, doing well in the world top 200, doing well in the UK rankings, exactly the reverse was true for us in for that fifteen year period [before he took on the role of v-c]. My job, I suppose was to make a diagnosis, find out what was wrong and make some corrective measures. Without sounding too arrogant I think I've achieved that and we're in a much better position now (Vice-chancellor of 1994 Group university).

The participant was asked the following and wider question about competition, between institutions, domestically, internationally and internally, in the context of an aspect of a discussion which focused on how he had restructured his institution, which had involved the reorganisation of the arts and humanities and social science faculties there into newly branded schools: What does the concentration on rankings, league tables - what effect does all this have on a university?

It polarises people. I mean many academics totally despise the simplification, and indeed, the inaccuracy of these ranking systems and I do myself actually. I think the world ranking system is totally flawed, that has real issues, real problems there on the basis that one of the big drivers is that is what do your colleagues say if you ask somebody in Hong Kong you know, what do you think of the university of X and they've say they've never heard of it and immediately you drop several places down the world rankings, so there's an arbitrariness about it and the metrics I think are questionable, so I think there's a side of which [pause] I think many of my colleagues here and myself to a certain extent feel trivializes what universities are about. On the other hand we're not going to get rid of league tables and we ignore them or neglect them at our peril because incoming students and potentially staff that you're looking to recruit know exactly where you're at on the rankings. I've just had two trips to China in the last six months and when you go in the room and you talk to the v-c or the president across the table and you say a few words about your respective universities, the Chinese start off immediately by talking about where they are in the local and world rankings. That's their opening gambit and they know exactly where you are. And that is the basis of the relationship because - and I think this is true across the world particularly China and Asia,

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<sup>205</sup> This participant was interviewed on three occasions however the above extracts have been taken from one interview.

but also I think in North America. They will only talk to universities which are in a similar sort of banding in terms of ranking, it's that sort of recognition (Vice-chancellor of 1994 Group university).

On the issue of competitiveness, metrics, league tables, one of the things which has been most helpful to us is being able to say to academics, and we're now talking about research, who seem to be quite comfortable with their research, when you can point out the fact that in comparator institutions for instance, they're way off the ball in terms of what you would expect an individual investigator to be attracting in terms of research funding, this is particularly true in the sciences where the big funding is, and to some extent in the social sciences as well, so being able to benchmark yourself against a similar individual in a comparator institution again, can be very helpful for culture change and pushing up quality<sup>206</sup>. I don't mind the competitive environment (Vice-chancellor of 1994 Group university).

Researcher's question: So competition is a positive driver?

I think it can be. Obviously if you let it run to its extreme then you can get obsessed by a rather limited number of metrics and forget about what else there is there – you know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. But I think again, used carefully these metrics can be useful in improving quality – and in also pointing out to people – I mean we know that in every university there are people who are not functioning in the way in which they should. And they've [pause] you're able to hide in universities, whereas you wouldn't be getting away with that in the private sector. And I think universities increasingly have to look at that, you just can't afford to pay people who aren't functioning properly. And if they think they can get away with that then I think they're in the wrong job and they should be thinking of doing something different. The days of the gentleman professor are over<sup>207</sup> (Vice-chancellor of 1994 Group university).

The participant had previously stated that there were academics engaged with obscure areas of research and ones which presumably had no worth in terms of research income. What is striking about these responses are the paradoxical lines of thought, which on one hand critique the unrepresentativeness, inaccuracy of the rankings systems and then on the other takes them to be an accurate and thus satisfactory mechanism with which to change the

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<sup>206</sup> In *In Search of Excellence: lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, Peters and Waterman quote MacGregor Burns and his book *Leadership* which offers the concept of *transforming leadership* which an important aspect of is, the motivation of others, i.e. followers, staff are motivated to achieve goals, through competition with others which in turn produces a cadre of new leaders. Competition is political, psychological and institutional, amongst other things (Peters and Waterman: 1984; 83)

<sup>207</sup> The participant had previously said that when he had arrived at the university there were too many postgraduate sessional teachers and not enough senior lecturers teaching and that feedback and contact time had been poor. NSS results had also not been as good as he would have liked because of this.

culture of his university which, is arguably, an established culture of higher education: unfettered, undirected inquiry. This is the darker disciplinary side of the research assessment exercise then. The removal of research (and academics) that do not fit the profile of an institution concerned with positioning itself at or near the pinnacle of the league of excellence. In taking a completely different view of life in the English university, a professor of sociology said this following a conversation which had focused, like some with the participants in the previous chapter, on the shortcomings of student engagement with the pedagogic process, in terms of preparedness for university life and because of the compartmentalization of study and the speed of modern life, in short the way that university life has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Having said all this, it's still the cushiest job in the world. [researcher's question: but your work load must be immense?]. Read Adorno's *Free Time* he says that the work and the free time distinction doesn't make sense to people in our profession, but it is the cushiest job in the world, why haven't we [pause] in the current economic climate there are 5,000 people losing their jobs today, while we are protected – at the moment – for now. So you know, I think - we're not working in companies that are having to make life or death, survival decisions every day. It's a cushy job. We're not doing anything physically demanding, we go home at three in the afternoon, you know. So the problem for people who work in universities is not pressure or job security or anything like that, it's meaninglessness, that's the problem and that's not just a Weberian speaking, it's meaninglessness, why are we doing this, but the fact that we get paid to do something, the point of which we cannot always easily specify is extraordinary, extraordinary. I'll tell you another thing, we also have the weirdest career structure of virtually any profession. Namely one in which you can advance to higher and higher positions, within departments at least, not only without having to take on more responsibility but actually in such a way that one casts off responsibility, which is the weirdest thing ... so there's these fantastic incentives to become a professor ... (professor of sociology, Russell Group university).

So this participant suggests that the lifeworld that the academic inhabits is a particular culture and one which is special in its uncertain relationship to means and ends<sup>208</sup>. In echoing the notion of the gentleman professor whose days the previous participant quoted argued were over, this participant instead presented this life as exactly what makes the

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<sup>208</sup> During the course of the interview the participant had discussed his dissatisfaction with the way that particular ideas of higher education and its purpose (instrumental or emancipatory) were being conveyed to undergraduates now, as his own experience had been one in which no definite idea was foisted upon students and that he and his peers had been left to make up their own minds about this.

academic profession special – extraordinary. But in this participant's view the idea that academics are hiding away, would perhaps be anathema, as it is clearly suggested by the participant in the extract above that the academic life is a constant – it is a vocation – work is not switched off when a professor or doctor leaves the institution to go home.

In echoing this perspective on the daily working life of the academic, another participant said this:

One of the things I was dealing with this afternoon was, because I was on the human resources committee, we weren't going to, but I brought it to the table anyway, because the UCU survey was published last week, which was about stress and long hours in universities. At one level that worries me. A lot of my colleagues have young families as have I, I don't want them to go home and not to be able to engage with their sons, daughters; I want to be able to go home when I'm finished with you and sit down and have dinner with my son and hear what letter he learned and sit with him and watch Mr Ben or whatever it might be. I want to switch off, I don't want to take work home with me, although I may come back to it, I probably will tonight [pause] so I may come back to it – so that's it, actually I do work long hours and I don't mind as long as I'm not stressed about them. So I think there's a dedication there, among many of my colleagues and it slightly paralyses me what do about it. I sent out an email earlier to my one of my senior colleagues saying, I think we should all resist the temptation to send an email after 6 o'clock at night, which I know I do from time-to-time because evenings is the only time we can get to catch up with email. And then people feel that this is the norm and it shouldn't be the norm but, there's nothing wrong with academics working 90-100 hour weeks if they absolutely passionately love what they're doing and they're putting those hours in because the book that they're writing embodies their ideas of excellence.

Excellence is actually quite complicated. People moan about the REF for example, I'm on the REF panel for my discipline this year for the first time, I've never moaned about the REF [the old RAE] because it's the best we can do in recognising excellence, collectively, and it's much better than universities simply saying that we're the best which is what would happen if we didn't have it. It is a mechanism that we've evolved to have some objective measure of what excellence actually is, and low and behold what it actually told us last time [RAE: 2008], and Oxford and Cambridge didn't like this at all, it told us that there is excellence right across the higher education sector in the UK, that even institutions like Liverpool Hope, even institutions like that have pockets of excellence, and I think that's fantastic and if we hadn't had the REF we wouldn't know that, we'd just assume that the rest of the country [pause] including the government would just assume that Oxford and Cambridge are the best places to study because that's where they [the politicians] went to do their degrees (professor of Geography and the head of a school at a 1994 Robbins university).

Thus from this it can be argued that the university is a way of life, its lifeworld and the desire for excellence is a constant to those who inhabit it: this represents the daily working

life of an academic. Moreover, this participant argues that the REF reveals that excellence is in existence across the sector, it is not just an element of the elite institutions and so the thesis surmises this helps to broaden the view of higher education held by the public and politicians. However, and perhaps in a contradiction, this participant also said that higher education is elitist in the sense that one has to have excelled to enter in to the academy in the first place. Peters and Waterman quote Ernest Becker<sup>209</sup> who argues that individuals seek identity as part of a winning institution in order to feel part of something greater than themselves, but however that we also all want to stand out as a successful individual in the winning institution: we seek un-freedom and freedom simultaneously, we have a desire to conform and, to be a star (Peters and Waterman: 1984; xxi).

And so there are different and mixed views of the research assessment exercises and how well they represent excellence in research, and indeed, whether they represent the excellence of individual institutions at all. So perhaps it is reasonable to argue that if the university rankings are unrepresentative of excellence in research and therefore unrepresentative of the sector as a whole<sup>210</sup>, a new way of defining excellence and the mission of higher education, the arts and humanities and social sciences in particular, would be beneficial to a greater social and indeed, political understanding of the university. The question is then, how and where would excellence be better represented in research and teaching and what concept of the university would fit modern 21 century Britain? Indeed, perhaps what is missing in the discussions of research excellence and indeed, how higher education promotes individual self-realisation through an independence of learning, is how emancipatory excellence is extended into wider economic and social life, that is to the collective and how this benefits us all. The following participant was asked about the way that the instrumental idea of the university is promoted over the more traditional liberal and liberating ideas of higher education and how this could be changed, if at all. The participant

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<sup>209</sup> See: *Escape from Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1975) pp. 3-6, 51.

<sup>210</sup> See Barnett (1992: 89-91) who argues that performance indicators have little to do with what is actually happening in higher education institutions, and more to do with legitimating an institutional hierarchy and an instrumental control of it.



discussed the dynamic role of universities and the way they infused the life of the cities they are situated in. He cited Sussex as having a particular culture which he also said was true of all universities, but that the critical mass which these institutions bring to their home cities as well as the country was similar and moreover, crucial. He said that Brighton would not be the city it is today had the University of Sussex not been there for the past 50 years shaping its social and, economic life and inducing a milieu of eudaimonia through the mutually reciprocating relationship of town and gown<sup>211</sup>. In the discussion, the participant suggested that a new idea of the university was needed which is more closely aligned to entrepreneurialism.

There are some people that try to bring these two agendas together [the instrumental and emancipatory ideas of the university], by saying the bottom line is about creativity, universities are creative places and you create these kind of networks of creative people, institutions in which the university is very important, so some of it is of course, about generating kind of software engineers (*sic*) who are going to do something really important or whatever, but these kind of software guys like hanging around in cafes and a kind of environment, a kind of culture, a kind of micro-culture, which university cities provide really and you just can't give people the high level analytical, technical skills outside this environment so you try and mix the two together. So it can be very individualistic, it's about creativity and about self-realisation... ... I suppose the sophisticated view of the new economy and our society would be, is actually that the way that we can be most economically productive, is by moving away from these rather technocratic models to different models of creativity which can be quite, quite anarchic at times but nevertheless produce this rich soup in which all these wonderful ideas come out of. Some of them might be crazy ideas which you're not very interested in and have no economic significance but some of them are really, really important and cutting edge and people relate it to social networking and all these sorts of other ideas. So you can begin to construct a scenario which brings together this very instrumental technocratic language and the more traditional old fashioned ideas

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<sup>211</sup> Another participant also emphasised the importance of the feeling of well-being induced in the community by the presence of a university or in this case two and how this is connected to the local political economy when the following proposition was put to him. Researcher's question: People are very proud to live in a university city even if they don't attend higher education aren't they? Participant's answer: We know that objectively. There was some work done about ten years ago by the city council. They did a survey of which asked people what they were most proud of in this city and the university came top by 8 out of 10 people. If a serious place doesn't have a university than the first thing it does it make itself a university. So the University of Northampton [for example], I mean these new universities - you know - and they're not doing that for no reason. This university is the biggest independent employer in this city. The only other employer is the NHS and the city council. The city council has sixteen thousand employees, the NHS across the two hospitals has about fourteen thousand, maybe twelve, the two universities will have about nine thousand, but we of course are not public sector. So we are the biggest businesses in town, which is something I frequently remind business men about, and the combined annual income from the two universities in this town is reckoned to be in the region of a billion pounds a year (Vice-chancellor and leading member of Universities UK).

about the university about being about self-realisation, in which actually these two can work together (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-92a and, professor of higher education).

Researcher's question: So this would be the technical, practical and, emancipatory interests of society coming together through the university - yes?

Yes you could say that actually by creating a kind of emancipatory culture that this maybe also be a highly entrepreneurial culture, and maybe these things are more closely aligned than people on both sides [of the argument] are prepared to admit... ... We could bring together these kind of emancipatory Enlightenment values in the course of creativity ... ... so that we could create a kind of alternative model [of the university] (Vice-chancellor of suburban London post-92a, and professor of higher education).

So the participant suggests here that universities have become integral to the lifeworld of the communities in which they exist and this relationship connects the emancipatory excellence of self-realisation to an entrepreneurial excellence which is essential to a blue-skies environment of creative thinking which then drives the design of new technology and other creative industries and the arts. In this way, the university is inextricably linked to economic society but retains its emancipatory role. Crucially, and with regard to research assessment, this suggests that research is driven – in part at least - as a participatory – dialectical - project between university and community without the need for the competitive institutional drivers discussed above<sup>212</sup>. It can be argued from this perspective on a new idea of the university that a communicative space or ideal speech situation already exists for the theoretical expression of excellence and that this in turn is the arena for the scientific-public validation of a critical theoretical perspective on the idea of higher education: excellence as the ideal for an individual and collective transformation.

### **The conclusion of the thesis**

The final moment in the methodological process of Critical Theory is the validation and verification of new explanatory and reconstructive theories geared to new world construction. This is achieved through the publication and dissemination of research papers

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<sup>212</sup> See: *Re-Thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty* by Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons (2001) for discussions on mode one and mode two knowledge and how *science* has become a mutually reciprocating process/venture between the university and science and the argument that this provides the space for a new social contract between science and society.

amongst the social-scientific community and in the public sphere. Theory geared to new world construction must pass through the crucible of academic and public scrutiny (Strydom: 2011; 158-165) and this of course represents an ideal speech situation for the university and the emancipatory ideals of social science and particularly sociology. This final moment in the emancipatory methodological process of Critical Theory is perhaps beyond the scope of this thesis: the thesis has attempted to present a reinterpretation of excellence as a contribution to the sociology of higher education by arguing through the presentation of literature and research material that this emancipatory ideal is a constant legitimating principle of the English university. It has also argued that excellence is not in critical condition, but rather, under threat from the failure to ensure that the drive for equal participation in higher education is maintained. However, and as a final subsidiary argument, what can also said from the final extracts of research material above (and indeed, material presented in the introductory and penultimate chapter) is that universities are embedded in the local communities in which they are situated as well as being acknowledged as part of the economic and cultural fabric of national life. Because of the expansion of English higher education and the rise of the new universities in particular, the space for an unconstrained discussion between higher education, individuals and politics exists nationally, but also crucially, at the local level, in the community where the lifeworld of the academy meets the cultural, social and economic interests of society<sup>213</sup>. This, theoretically, is the space where the interests of higher education – excellence as the emancipatory ideal – can be argued for, that is, juxtaposed with the interests of wider society and, the state in an attempt to reveal the university as the emancipatory vehicle of society which represents human interests over simple economic ones.

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<sup>213</sup> See Nowotny (1993: 308) who states that: The notion of the public is itself dynamic since the public continues to be constituted and reconstituted through the process of social distribution of scientific and technological knowledge. The public is therefore highly heterogeneous, well informed, and possesses expertise or protoexpertise; it also articulates its own interests and views which depend upon the context of the encounter and potential use. These contexts represent structured societal spaces of discourse and knowledge claims, through which a mixture of expert, protoexpert and lay interests become shaped and legitimated. See also Bohman (1999; 475-79) who in discussing Habermas, Dewey and the democratic and participatory nature of knowledge verification and so the pragmatic approach of Critical Theory, describes social actors as knowledgeable social agents to who critical social science addresses its claims (Bohman: 1999; 475).

## **Bibliography**

This bibliography begins with an anonymised list of research participants which gives their position/title and a description of the type of institution they were resident at during this research project.

### **Russell Group university**

1. Professor of Sociology
2. Registrar
3. Professor of English and Cultural studies
4. Vice-Chancellor (interviews with this participant informed the thesis but are not represented)

### **Suburban London post-92**

5. Vice-Chancellor (a) (interviewed twice)
6. Vice-Chancellor (b) (interviewed once)
7. Professor of Higher Education
8. Head of the School of the Built Environment
9. Dean of the Arts and Humanities Faculty (interviewed twice)

### **Robbins university and member of the 1994 mission Group**

10. Vice-Chancellor (interviewed three times)
11. Head of a big school
12. Doctor of Education

### **Other participants:** single interview participants at individual institutions

Vice-Chancellor and member of the Browne Review

Vice-Chancellor of post-92 and widening participation leader

Vice-Chancellor of big civic and representative of Universities UK

Emeritus Professor of higher education and policy specialist

Professor of higher education at policy think-tank

Chief Executive Officer at mission group

Reader in Sociology, post-92

Professor of Higher Education (former vice-chancellor) and policy expert

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## **Abbreviations**

AFC: Academic Freedom Committee

AUT: Association of University Teachers

BIS: Business Innovation and Skills

CATs: Colleges of Advance Technology

CBI: Confederation of British Industry

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CMC: Computer Mediated Communication

CNNA: Council for National Academic Awards

CPPI: Consumer Price Inflation Index

CSR: Comprehensive Spending Review

CVCP: Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principles

DBIS: The Department of Business Innovation and Skills

DES: Department of Education and Science

DfE: Department for Education

DES: Department of Education and Science

DIUS: Department of Industry Universities and Science

DOE: Department of Education

DTC: Doctoral Training Centre

EMA: Educational Maintenance Allowance

EQL: Equivalent Lower Qualification

ESCR: Economic and Social Research Council

EU: European Union

FE: Further Education

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HE: Higher Education

HEA: Higher Education Authority

HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England



HEI: Higher Education Institute

HEPI: Higher Education Policy Institute

HPV: Human Papilloma Virus

ICT: Information Computer Technology

ILTHE: Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

IPPR: Institute for Public Policy Research

IS: International Systems

ISS: Ideal Speech Situation

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IPPR: Institute for Public Policy Research

ISS: Ideal Speech Situation

IT: Information Technology

KIS: Key Information Set

LEA: Local Education Authority

LSE: London School of Economics

MAD: Mutually Assured Destruction

MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology

MP: Member of Parliament

NCIHE: National Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education

NHS: National Health Service

NSS: National Student Survey

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OFFA: Office for Fair Access

OFQUAL: The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

OSS: Organisational Support System

PCFC: Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council

PDA: Political Discourse Analysis

PES: Public Expenditure Survey

PLC: Public Limited Company

PR: Public Relations

QAA: Quality Assurance Agency

QR: Quality Research

RAB: Resource Accounting Budget

RAE: Research Assessment Exercise

REF: Research Excellence Framework

RSE: Research Selectivity Exercise

SISTERS: Special Institutions for Scientific and Technological Education and Research

SLC: Student Loan Company

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

TCA: Theory of Communicative Action

TINA: There is no alternative

TUC: Trade Union Congress

TV: Television

TQM: Total Quality Management

UCAS: University and Colleges Admissions Service

UCL: University College London

UFC: University Funding Council

UGC: University Governing Council

UK: United Kingdom

UKBA: United Kingdom Border Agency

UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party

UUK: Universities United Kingdom

UOM: University of Manchester

US: United States

UWP: Universal Welfare Provision

WEA: Workers Educational Association

WHO: World Health Organisation

## Appendix

### Ethics

The research for this thesis was conducted as much as possible according to the guidelines set out in the British Sociological Association guidelines (BSA: 2002). With regard to the principles of trust and integrity, this thesis has striven to present an accurate and truthful account of research interview material and through this to present a positive image of the institution of English higher education. Moreover, it has sought to protect the identity of all participants as far as possible by anonymising them and their institution by presenting them through their position (e.g., professor of sociology) and their institutions through classification type. For example, mission group or age, i.e., post-92, Robbins or Russell Group institution. Where the participant has been identified, as for example, in the case of 'vice-chancellor and member of the Browne Review', the thesis has attempted to anonymise the identity of their institution by not referring to type or age. On occasion, a participant has been explicit in the course of an interview about the location of their institution thereby giving a possible reference to that university's identity. However, the participant's identity remains only knowable through position held and in which discipline they are in, in that institution. The material contained within these particular interviews was considered to be of considerable importance to the thesis.

Birch and Miller state this with regard to the ethical dilemmas faced by researchers in the digital age:

Ethical questions in the research relationship, the use of data and the interpretative and analytical processes have all become more significant as the landscape of qualitative research continues to change and researchers face new issues when using new tools to produce knowledge. Ethical dilemmas about how much information to disclose to whom and in what contexts, the blurring of boundaries of privacy, access to and sharing of information, face so many more of us, not only within research worlds but in multiple layers of connection and communication with others. This means that suddenly we have all become more responsible for looking after and for caring about what we reveal and under what conditions (Birch and Miller: 2012:2)

All participants were informed by email before the interview stage commenced of the focus of the thesis and they were also informed of the ethical framework of the thesis which was one of anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews were conducted using a digital recording device and the participants were assured that the data would be stored securely and be accessible only to the researcher.

In sum, the research for this thesis was conducted in a transparent way as possible. Moreover, the thesis has attempted to use the research material presented in-text in the context and sense in which it was first given, thereby maintaining firstly, the integrity of participant and secondly, of the researcher.

## Footnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> The contemporary English university is represented by a number of mission groups, interest groups and a think-tank. The Russell Group ostensibly represents the big research intensive institutions including Oxford and Cambridge. The now disbanded 1994 Group represented the smaller research intensive universities. The Alliance Group tends to represent the new universities, i.e. the post-92s who have a strong market orientation. The Million+ think-tank also represents post-92s but its interests are strongly associated with access and widening participation. Guild HE represents the smaller specialist colleges of for example, art and music. The English university sector is said to be dominated by the Russell Group which is argued to be the most politically influential in English higher education. Indeed, the existence of the various mission groups has been said to be divisive, and research material in chapter five of the thesis in particular tends to confirm this view. The following websites are a useful guide to these groups:

<http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/>

<http://www.unialliance.ac.uk/>

<http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/>

<http://www.guildhe.ac.uk/>

<sup>ii</sup> Morgan in *The Times Higher Education*: (2014) refers to a hypothesis put forward by Mr Willetts (who it is thought has invited the Russell Group to take soundings about the concept) in which elite universities such as Oxford would fare less well than some post-92s. This is because of the variation in loan write off rates between universities estimated by the RAB. Because an Oxford graduate is likely to earn well and repay much of their loan then this university would pay a high price to the government for their graduate debt. However, because graduates at an institution like the University of Bedfordshire earn less and repay less that university would pay less to the government to buy their student debt. Moreover, they would be well placed to turn a profit if after buying the government debt they could improve graduate performance in the employment market and see greater returns on repayments. (Morgan in 2014a). However, as Morgan (2014a) points out in his article that the Shareholder Executive, the section of BIS responsible for government owned businesses, has explored the idea on behalf of Mr Willetts who it is thought pushed for the idea to be included in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement before he left his position as universities and science minister. Morgan's article also quotes Ryan Shorthouse who recommended a similar scheme to Mr Willetts in a 2010 paper for the Social Market Foundation think-tank who said: 'Universities should and can play a larger role in funding, especially in ensuring that the government's RAB charge is sustainable. The scheme could quite reasonably be construed of course, as a clever way of ridding the government of debt on the balance sheet and, of avoiding risk and using as yet still, the public institution of the university to do so.

It could also of course be argued to be yet another mechanism or 'technocratic fix' (*ibid*) to calibrate for the original miscalculation by BIS on estimates of universities fee charges and student loan repayment rates. And, perhaps arguably, this is the most likely rationale for the scheme, because in fact universities, in what Morgan (*ibid*) describes is a 'complex flow of money' would be lent 90% of the money needed to buy the debt and 'might still need to work with a bank or pension fund to finance the purchase of the other 10%. Morgan (2014a) states that Mr Willetts is known to have met Santander in 2011 to discuss this but that 'there has hardly been a stampede of interest'. Thus this very elaborate, if not byzantine scheme would, if introduced, ostensibly transfer the debt from the government to universities and create the façade that universities held the purse strings whilst in fact repaying the state before taking any reward for themselves. Thus it could reasonably be argued that the former universities and science minister and BIS were desperate to find a calibration for the mistake they made in their estimation of the RAB and the effects this had on government spending, debt, inflation and benefits, despite the risk and uncertainty that such an untested scheme (that is without a full and prior economic analysis of each university's proportion of debt) would surely bring. Thus what is of most relevance here with regard to the success or not of the economic strategy of the changes to the funding of English higher education by the Coalition, is the miscalculation of potential loan defaults in the future and the effect of government spending via the student loan on the Consumer Price Inflation Index (CPII). The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) conclude that 'the cost will be much higher than has been admitted, both because repayments of loans is likely to be

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much lower than claimed and also because the inflationary impact of the fees will mean that the level of benefits – which are linked to the CPPI - will be increased’ (HEPI: 2012).

The basic rationale for the introduction of new fees system (to save the tax payer and government money) is now generally agreed to be fundamentally flawed, as indeed it was argued that it might be from its inception (HEPI: 2010:3). Indeed as suggested above, the system is considered unsustainable as the projected number of defaults in future fee repayments is nearing the threshold, whereby they would cancel out any savings made by the trebling of fees and cutting of the T grant made in the first instance. Bekhradnia (2014) argues that ‘the present system is now generally agreed to be unsustainable given that 45 per cent of the money lent to students will never be paid back’. Indeed, there is no doubt amongst higher education policy specialists and commentators, including a number of those interviewed for this study, that the next political administration will have to deal with devising and implementing a new funding regime. Labour has tentatively proposed a new fees regime of £6,000 and a graduate tax to replace the current system if they were to win the next general election. This would solve the repayment default issue, that is, reduce the RAB, but the shortfall in funds for teaching would need to be made-up, as the President of Universities UK, Sir Christopher Snowden has pointed out to the official opposition, as well as emphasising to them that this time it needs to be a sustainable system (Morgan, Times Higher Education: 2015a).

iii A doctor of education said this when asked how government policy affected him in the context of the immigration controls:

‘Yes. This makes a huge difference to the way we work. Yet, the government still has great control over what we do and dictates the way that we spend our time. I mean, what is today's news? Today's news is about London Met and UKBA. That's what I've been coping with. Government policy on things like that mean that we have all sorts of difficulties around international students, and what happens if their wife is ill and they need to intermit? If they're on Tier 4, you have to send them home now even though their wife is getting treatment in Britain. So, you're in this stupid dilemma. So, all the time, whatever you're doing seems to be regulated by government policy, even though the funds which have sustained us are no longer there’ (Doctor of Education, 1994 Group, Robbins university)

The doctor was also concerned at the way in which a market had been introduced into teacher training and the way that schools were now able to choose to take graduates from the university schools of education or straight from their first degrees on to schemes such as Teach First.

iiii To understand the Robbins Report it is perhaps first necessary to understand the man who produced it.

By the time of the report, Lionel Robbins was an eminent and a much respected professor and teacher of economics at the LSE, ‘a man of dazzling intellectual brilliance’ (William J. Baumol, foreword in Medema and Samuels: 1998). Robbins was also a man of the arts and music, thus cultured to the dizzy heights. He was, as Baumol also states, a man of striking personality and physical appearance. He was ‘tall, massive, stately with a sonorous voice and a leonine mane’, an appearance which perhaps belied his sharpness and a steely determination to hold to the highest principles in life. In a similar vein to Baumol, Carswell (1985: 27-8) states that ‘when I first met him he impressed me as bland silver lion, all mass and whiteness. His huge frame was surmounted by a huge face and mane of silvery hair. Along with his gentle manner one sensed a giant paw from which a claw or two would sometimes make a carefully modulated appearance’. Carswell goes on to say that he had never encountered anyone ... who was more confident that he was right’. Carswell (*ibid*) describes him as a man who had great abilities and a magnificent personality. However, Carswell goes on to say that as well as ‘loving government and believing that he understood its ways, he was easily captivated by form and structure and that he saw before him high principles and noble goals, and was liable to ignore or wave aside brutal or uncomfortable realities’ (Carswell: 1985; 28).

Perhaps somewhat in contradiction to this view however, Howson (2011: 1-5) paints a picture of a man able to change his mind, even when confronting the most difficult realities of life. Howson tells the story of Robbin’s evolving political views, his gradual loss of religious faith and the rejection of his parents’ liberalism for socialism, out of which grew his interest in economics and his growing love of art and music and which grew to replace religion in his life. Robbins had completed one term at

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UCL reading intermediate arts when he entered the Royal Artillery as an officer cadet. He served and was injured on the Western front in 1918. He returned from the war still a socialist and he resumed his education at the LSE (1920-23) after two years working in the labour movement. After going on to teach at New College Oxford, Robbins found himself running the economics department at the LSE at the end of the 1920s and through into the 1930s. It was here that he met, among many other brilliant scholars and economists, the Austrian, Friedrich von Hayek with whom he would become close friends. After a visit to Vienna in 1933, Robbins along with William Beveridge formed the Academic Freedom Committee (AFC). This helped Jews and liberal academics and students to escape Nazi Germany (perhaps it is possible to surmise here that Robbins lost his commitment to socialism not solely due to his association with Hayek but because of his exposure to the realities of 'national socialism').

During the depression in the 1930s, John Maynard Keynes was charged by the Labour prime-minister, Ramsay MacDonald, with chairing a committee which would provide a remedy for the mass unemployment of those times. Howson (2011: 3) recounts the story of how Robbins, who was invited by Keynes to serve on the committee, later deeply regretted his negative attitude to public expenditure and his refusal to follow Keynes's lead in protection and public works. Robbins had originally preferred Hayek's 'Austrian' theory. In fact, he came to reject Hayek's theory in his second book *The Great Depression* in 1934. Howson (2011: 3) quotes from Robbins's biography where he states 'I realised that these constructions [of theory] led to conclusions that were highly unpalatable regarding practical action. But ... [if they were valid] it was my duty to base recommendations as regards policy upon them. There was a touch of the Nonconformist conscience here'. Howson (2011:3) however, states that 'But he never regretted or budged from his free-trade stance or lost his concern for real-world political and economic issues'. Howson tells how Robbins went on to be a pivotal part of the Bretton Woods agreement and of his other public service in the war-time British coalition government. Howson (2011: 4) states that 'on this and on earlier missions to Washington, Robbins became personally very close to Keynes despite their doctrinal differences in the 1930s'. Indeed, Howson (2011: 5) states that Robbins 'was consistently critical of the inadequate use of monetary policy as an instrument for the preservation of the balance-of-payments under the Bretton Wood system of fixed exchange rates'. So this was the man, and one who it seems during his life was able to reflect upon his political and economic position, and even in earlier life, to change this, but a man who was deeply principled and committed to carrying out what he saw as his duty to government in public service, even when the theory did not coincide with his own and even if he felt to be in the minority as was the case with regard to his position to the depression of the 1930s, when the consequences of his preferred economic theory were then, as he stated, unpalatable. He believed in doing what he thought was right and as Carswell (1985: 28) states from the outset of the Robbins report 'he was determined to be liberal and just to all'.

Perhaps it is possible to argue that a proud religious zeal remained in Robbins even after his departure from the church and thus equally, perhaps, Carswell's (*ibid*) analysis of Robbins's overwhelming self-assuredness is in fact correct. Indeed, Howson (2011:4) states that Robbins was determined to leave government service after the war, which he did, (although taking part in vigorous public policy debates and being consulted by two chancellors of the exchequers in the 1950s and, sitting on a committee on the export of art and receiving a life-peerage from MacMillan in 1958 ) and was reluctant, after nearly 20 years of life in academia at the LSE and after becoming chair of various arts and music boards as well as chairman of the Financial Times to take on the Chairmanship of the Committee of Higher Education. Moser (1988: 5) quoting from Robbins's autobiography states that after being called late in 1960 by R.A. Butler, then Home Secretary to chair the committee he was extremely hesitant, having previously having found himself bored by the subject [of higher education] and abstract statements on the subject by vice-chancellors and educationalists and having wanted to write a new book on economics. But he did go on to chair the Committee and Carswell (1985:28) perhaps gives us the reason: 'He saw, correctly, that a moment had come in the history of higher education at which mere endorsement of official advice would fall short on this occasion. He intended from the first that his report should mark a great advance' (*my emphasis*). Similarly, Moser (1988: 5) states that he accepted the role because of his passionate belief in education, and as Robbins stated in his autobiography, because it was one of the most important political and social problems of the day and of much more use than 'yet another general work on economics' (Robbins: 1971).